A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE PERSONAL IN HINDU AND IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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PREFACE

My aims in this study are twofold : to compare the thought of Shankara and Rāmānuja in order to discover which, if either, is more consistent with the contemporary Vedānta ethic of love and social service, and to compare the thought of both with certain central strands in Christian thought where an ethic of love is also preached. The conclusion which emerges in the course of the argument is that an ethic of love can be sustained only when the concept of agency is made central and that both traditions face similar problems which require the development of an adequate 'metaphysics of the personal', i.e. a metaphysical scheme in which reality is shown to be such that the values implicit in taking seriously the reality of the empirical world and the individual person and his actions are justified.

The starting point is a divergence in the interpretation of religious experience and hence in the implied account of the person, which occurs both in Christianity and in Hinduism. This is exemplified in the philosophies of Shankara and Rāmānuja. In Shankara's case religious experience is interpreted in terms of the realisation of the identity of the individual self with the universal self, Brahman. This aim may be termed self-realisation. Rāmānuja repudiates this interpretation of religious experience on the grounds that the supposition that the individual self is identical with the universal self affords the individual no hope : he cannot identify himself as the entity which is to achieve liberation. We start from the reality of the relationship between the worshipper and God and hence affirm the reality of the individual self and its distinctness from the deity. The values implicit in this interpretation of experience are those of interpersonal relationship. Thus the values of self-realisation and the values of interpersonal relationship are set in contrast within Vedānta philosophy.

Although the rank and file of Hindus are mainly theists of some sort, the values espoused by philosophical exponents of Vedānta are generally based, in contemporary thought, on what we have termed the aim of self-realisation, i.e. Shankara's non-dualism. It is argued that the values implicit in Rāmānuja's theism can be subsumed under the umbrella of monistic non-dualism. I have contended that this is not the case and that the reverse position is more accurate. The concept of the self as the spectator of the world is dependent on the concept of the self as a conscious agent in the world. Nevertheless, in my examination of Rāmānuja's philosophy I have concluded that although there can be no doubt of the sincerity of his desire to justify the reality of the empirical world and the individual selves, yet the metaphysical presuppositions which he shares with Shankara preclude him from doing so adequately.

On the Christian side we have a comparable divergence of meaning in the philosophical analysis of the concept of a person. In this case the main emphasis falls on the values of interpersonal relationship. Although the corollary of this is that the self as acting subject must be regarded as the starting point of philosophical speculation, yet the tendency of philosophers has been to treat the self as primarily a knowing subject and hence as a spectator of action rather than as agent.

It can be seen from the foregoing that the issues dealt with in this work are wide-ranging. It may provoke the criticism that too much has been dealt with in too little detail and that important issues have received scanty treatment. It is certainly the case that the nature of the subject is such that to deal adequately with it would require several lengthy volumes. In view of this it might be thought more prudent to have considered only one aspect of the theme and given this

detailed treatment. I believe, however, that the different points raised are so inter-related that in order to gain a proper understanding of the issues involved, it is necessary to deal with them all in a single study. The philosophical issues involved in contemporary Hinduism have their roots in classical thought. Yet their ramifications are relevant to Christian thought, and both Hinduism and Christianity, in their respective analyses of the religious consciousness, must take account of contemporary philosophical analysis of the nature of the self.

The actual plan of the work treats the occurrence of contrasting accounts of the nature of personal existence, i.e. the self as knower and as agent, within three of the 'key ideas' of Hindu thought : Brahman, ātman and dharma and moksha - in other words, the ultimate reality, the self, and the end or aim of life. Here we have a progression of ideas. An account of the nature of ultimate reality influences the interpretation which is put on religious experience and hence on the individual self. It is in the light of one's conception of what constitutes the reality of the self that a meaningful account of the end of life can be given. In each Chapter I have compared the characteristic ideas of Shankara and Rāmānuja with similar developments of thought within Christianity. My conclusion is that neither Shankara nor Rāmānuja provide a metaphysics adequate to the demands both of religious experience and of practical life. Shankara stresses the transcendence of the ultimate reality and value at the expense of its intelligibility and relevance to this life : Rāmānuja, while insisting on the importance of the empirical world of plurality, fails to provide an adequate means of individuating the separate selves and hence of guaranteeing their uniqueness and value.

The overall conclusions are thus both negative and positive. Both Shankara and Rāmānuja are found wanting. Yet from the study of their

writings we find important similarities in the problems facing contemporary Hindu and Christian theologians in the attempt to interpret their traditional messages in a contemporary setting. This affords the possibility that, while maintaining their distinct individualities, each faith may profit from some insight drawn from the other tradition. As Greek philosophy became absorbed into Christianity so too may Hindu philosophy, and from the study of the 'process theology' of Christianity both traditions may come to talk more intelligibly about God.

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The Purpose Of A Comparative Study

'The primary purpose of a comparative study is faithfully to describe the different approaches to, and the various methods employed in the systematisation of, the same or similar data, experiential and speculative ..... Attempts at evaluation ..... should proceed ..... on the basis of the common purpose of the systems compared and ..... in the light of the aims of philosophy as a discipline with its peculiar methods and special history.'[1]

It may be as well to consider at the outset what we hope to gain from a comparative study. The first aim is exegetical. That is to consider the conception of the personal as it occurs within the particular framework of each tradition of thought. Since it was from within the context of Hindu thought that my attention was first directed to problems connected with the conception of the personal I have endeavoured to facilitate its exegetical development within Hindu thought by considering in turn certain 'key' concepts in which its significance is clearly expressed. Thus we proceed from the study of Brahman to that of the Ātman to that of Dharma and Moksha.

The second aim is critical. I hope to show that, despite differences in emphasis, there is yet sufficient similarity in certain developments of thought within each tradition to make a dialogue both fruitful and constructive. I shall argue that contemporary currents of thought in each tradition are facing similar questions which demand similar answers and that only an adequate conception of the personal can provide a satisfactory answer.

1 N.K. Devaraja, An Introduction to Shankara's Theory of Knowledge, Banaras Hindu University Press, 1962, p.148.

Objections

It may be objected that it is impossible to evaluate critically religious conceptions. Each side is convinced of the correctness of its ideas and in the absence of any acceptable set of independent criteria, criticism can only be the substitution of one religious dogma for another.

This is not the whole story however. In order to understand anything, whether it be another religion, way of life, or simply someone else's problem, there must be an attempt to 'get inside' the relevant framework of thought and to see matters from the other's point of view. To understand a theory or a way of life, however, is not necessarily to accept it. One may come to see that it contains inconsistencies, even within its own terms of reference; or one may come to question the terms of reference, the assumptions which make the basic framework of thought. This may be because there are areas of experience with which these assumptions are incapable of dealing. I shall argue that the Hindu treatment of the question of the personal is inadequate because it fails to give a satisfactory analysis of action.

How do we in fact decide, the objector might pursue, what is in fact an adequate analysis of any feature of human experience? Is this not just a matter of preference, depending on what we see as important in life? In the face of the difficulties in the way of any attempt to reach agreement on fundamental matters concerning human existence this may seem the ideal attitude to adopt - in theory. In practice, however, it is a fact that people do expend time and energy in trying to convince others that one mode of life is better than another or one set of convictions preferable to another. One may think that much of

their effort is misguided, and so it may be. But suppose that all their efforts is misguided. Suppose that the parent is wasting his time debating the value of different methods of child-discipline, or the teenager in considering the merits of pop and pot. To suppose that every choice can be ascribed ultimately to preference is to oversimplify the complexity of human life. The upshot of this is that we must continue to argue our case and endeavour to point in support of it to areas of human experience where we think agreement may be possible.

The Field Of Study

The conception of the personal is obviously an extremely wide and even vague subject of study, and particularly so when dealt with in the context of two separate traditions of thought. In order to say something constructive within a reasonable space it has been necessary to limit the topics dealt with. Since my interest originated from within the field of Hindu thought, I have centred my exegetical discussion around the Hindu thinkers, Shankara and Ramānuja. These thinkers represent the opposing views of strict monism or non-dualism and theism. It is an important task of contemporary Hindu thought to harmonise these two positions in order to present both a coherent account of the world as a whole and a satisfactory account of personal and social ethics. The question of the nature of the personal is crucial here and in the critical side of my study I have been concerned to argue that only by recognising that to be personal is to be essentially an agent will progress be made in solving both the metaphysical and the ethical issues. On the Christian side I have not concentrated on any specific philosophers within the traditional thought of the Church, but rather I have endeavoured to give positive expression to what I believe to be the Christian insight that the self is primarily an agent who finds himself in interaction with others.

The overall aim has been to demonstrate that each tradition is in need of an adequate metaphysics of the personal and to show the direction in which such a metaphysics might be developed.

The relation between 'person' and 'personal' requires some elucidation. Although the present study is concerned with the 'personal' as a religious conception in Hinduism and Christianity, it obviously cannot completely ignore non-religious discussion of the concept of a person. Particularly it cannot ignore the vast amount of recent analysis of the nature of the person and of the criteria for personal identity.

The terms 'person' and 'personal' are what Waismann called 'open-ended' : the criteria for ascribing them to anything are not cut and dried and it is possible to argue over doubtful cases. Part of the vagueness in the terms may be brought out by considering that 'person' may be used simply to refer to a specific type of individual in a non-emotive way or it may be used in a highly evaluative context to refer to a specific manner of acting of the individuals classified as persons. Thus, there are five persons in the room; before being introduced they were mere nameless faces, but since meeting them I am forced to regard them as persons, i.e. in a personal manner. In general it is regarded as praiseworthy to act in a personal manner, but this need not always be the case. There are many situations in life which call for the adoption of an impersonal attitude. The sergeant major in the army, for example, must adopt an impersonal attitude to his recruits if he is to make soldiers out of them. Two opposing evaluations of 'personal' are illustrated in the phrases 'personal attention' and 'There's no need to be personal' said in reply to a criticism.

What is the connection between these different shades of meaning of

'person' and 'personal'? An obvious reply is that it is persons who act in a personal manner. This needs qualification, however. One may be a person and yet act impersonally. And entities other than persons may meaningfully be said to act personally. For example, Firm A is to be commended in treating its employees as persons while Firm B simply sees them as names on a payroll. It may be helpful here to distinguish between the non-emotive and the emotive use of these terms by reserving 'person' for non-emotive contexts and 'personal' for emotive contexts. This has several advantages. It allows us to recognise the non-emotive nature of contemporary philosophical analysis of 'person'. With some notable exceptions, contemporary philosophers have had no particular axes to grind with regard to the evaluation of persons though they have been interested in the application of their analyses to traditional religious dogmas such as the survival of the soul. It also allows us to recognise that the phrase 'the conception of the personal' within a religious context, has an essentially emotive ring. Here indeed the evaluative element is primary and is dependent largely on the particular interpretation offered of the nature of religious experience. A large part of the thesis will be concerned with this point so it need not be further elaborated here. It is enough to note that the evaluation of the person determines the analysis of the person rather than vice versa. A further advantage in reserving the term 'personal' for emotive contexts is that it allows us to recognise clearly that it is not only entities describable as 'persons' which may be designated 'personal'. This is important for the theistic tradition which sees God as personal, but not as a person.

From what has been said it can be seen that discussion of the concept of a person in a non-religious context is not necessarily relevant to discussion of the conception of the personal in a religious context.

The starting point for the one is our experience of identifiable individuals of a certain type; the starting point for the other is an experience or complex of experiences which are taken to be constitutive of the ultimate reality and value. In order to understand the latter we must first understand the context of beliefs in which it occurs.

Shankara and Rāmānuja represent two opposing evaluations of the conception of the personal within Hindu thought and two different accounts of religious experience. It is too easily assumed by philosophers who are familiar only with the Christian religion that the characteristics of religion are the same in all contexts. For example, John MacMurray says in his book, The Self As Agent, that it is characteristic of religion that it behaves towards its objects in ways suitable to personal intercourse. This may be true of Christianity, but it is hardly true of Advaita Hinduism. It must also be said that a similar mistake is often made by Hindu writers. For example, Devaraja says 'The philosophers of ancient and medieval India had a surer grasp of the fundamentals of religious life and consciousness than their counterparts in almost any other place and time. Having analysed the specific religious attitude of consciousness which constitutes the ..... being of the witness self, Indian philosophy sets about to furnish the metaphysical concepts which would explain and justify the incidence of that consciousness in the universe.'[1]

Here we have two diametrically opposed views of the nature of religion and correspondingly different views of the nature of the personal. MacMurray sees the heart of religion in personal relationship : Devaraja finds it is the isolation of the 'witness-self'. The

1 Op. Cit. pp.iv-v.

implication of the former view is that the personal always involves the realisation of an 'other' and a relationship with it, whereas the latter view is that the essence of the personal can only be realised in splendid isolation. To complicate the situation, however, Hinduism also has a vigorous theism which emphasises the relationship between the worshipper and God. This we shall see implies a view of the nature of the personal which does not entirely tally with the ideal of the witness-self and likewise a different account of the nature of the religious consciousness.

To return to the Christian standpoint, 'personal' in its emotive sense has played a major role in Christian tradition in terms of such influential ideals as that of the supreme value of the person or the individual as such. This is typified in Kant's injunction that each person should be treated as an end in himself. To appeal to the consideration that someone is a person is not primarily to say something about him which could be tested and verified, but rather to specify the sort of behaviour which may be expected of him and the sort of treatment which ought to be given him. It is to evaluate him by placing him within a conceptual framework based on Christian thought and tradition.

It is not enough, however, to recognise that 'person' in a non-emotive sense and 'personal' in an emotive sense can be regarded as distinct concepts. If any particular conception of the personal is to be applied to persons, it presupposes the possibility of an account of the concept 'person'. A religious understanding of 'person' cannot regard itself as immune from criticism from non-religious directions. An attempt must be made to render compatible both religious and non-religious experience. This must always be a two-way traffic : neither side can be presumed to have the advantage over the other.

An example of the way in which the conception of the personal presupposes an account of the concept 'person' is given in the religious understanding of morality. The believer's understanding of morality is part and parcel of his religious understanding in general. (This may be accepted without prejudice to the question of the logical connection between fact and value, a subject which has also received close attention in recent philosophy.) The theist is committed to the acceptance of the ultimate identity of fact and value. This is expressed by Thomas Aquinas when he says,

'Goodness and being are identical in reality, but the term goodness conveys what the term being does not, namely, the quality of being desirable.'[1]

The believer directs his life in the light of his religious understanding and, therefore, the long-term motivation of his actions must be sought in his understanding of the conception of the personal. This is the standpoint from which he views his life. If, for example, it is the standpoint of a knowing subject then any account given of the concept 'person' must be consonant with the adoption of this standpoint. This leads to the question of whether it is possible to give an account of the concept 'person' in terms which regard a person as primarily a knowing subject. 'Neutral' philosophical analysis has an important part to play here. By 'neutral' analysis I mean an analysis which is neither pro- nor anti- the religious standpoint in question, but which seeks to connect it in a positive way with the totality of experience. In the Chapters which follow I shall endeavour to clarify Shankara and Rāmānuja's conceptions of the personal and to ask whether they may be regarded as compatible with a coherent account of the concept 'person'.

1 Summa Theologica, la.v.l.

Shankara And Rāmānuja

The main subjects of the comparison will be the two Hindu philosophers, Shankara and Rāmānuja. They represent two main streams of Hindu philosophical thought. The term 'Hinduism' represents such a vast agglomeration of tradition and practice that it may present an over-simplified picture to speak simply of two main streams of Hindu thought. There are six systems of thought in classical Hinduism of which Vedānta, the school to which both Shankara and Rāmānuja belong, is one. In addition, there are numerous other sects and traditions. The most important and well-known of the classical systems from the modern philosopher's viewpoint is undoubtedly the Vedānta and the Vedānta includes both Shankara's monism and Rāmānuja's theism.

Shankara lived in the 8th century AD and is the acknowledged representative of the monistic or non-dual Vedānta philosophy : Rāmānuja lived in the 11th century AD and is likewise the outstanding exponent of the theistic Vishishtādvaita school of Vedānta philosophy. Both Shankara and Rāmānuja teach that there is only one ultimate principle behind the universe : but while Rāmānuja holds that this principle admits of internal differentiation, Shankara denies this. Shankara believes in the ultimate unreality of differences and, therefore, in the ultimate unreality of individual persons or selves separate from the Absolute. Rāmānuja believes in the reality of difference and, derivatively, in a plurality of real selves which are separate and distinct from the Absolute. The Absolute for Shankara, being devoid of all attributes whatever, cannot have any personal attributes, but for Rāmānuja, the affirmation of the real nature of difference, allows him to say that the Absolute is personal in character and has personal attributes.

From the Western Christian point of view this is of considerable

interest. Within this tradition it has generally been taken for granted that the terms God and ultimate reality refer to something which is personal. There have, of course, been dissenters, but within the mainstream of Christianity Scripture has taught that God loves and cares for the world, and philosophers from Plato onwards have wished to ascribe mental qualities such as knowing and willing to God. The recognition of the complete otherness of God from anything to be found in the world was tempered with the conviction that God could be correctly described in terms drawn from human experience since the characteristics of humanity were in some way a copy of the divine. Thomas Aquinas, for example, says that -

'the divine substance exceeds by its immensity every form which our intellect attains'.[1]

But he also in his doctrine of analogy insists that human terms are applicable, if inadequately, to the deity. For example,

'When it is said that God is good, the sense is ..... that what is meant by goodness in creatures pre-exists in God, and indeed more intensely.'[2]

The conviction that the Christian God is personal in character has been coupled with the belief that the relation between the soul and God is ultimate : even in mystical ecstasy God and the soul remain different though indissolubly united. This difference in identity has given the metaphor of the marriage relationship great appeal in Christian literature. What these considerations amount to from the Christian point of view is the conviction that religious experience is essentially personal in character, that it involves an interchange between the object of worship and the worshipper which is of the nature of an

1 Summa Contra Gentiles, 1, 14.

2 Summa Theologica, 1a, xiii, 2.

interchange between persons, and resulting from this, the conviction that the personal is in some way the highest evaluative category that there is. It is of interest, then, to realise that within one religion, viz. Hinduism, there can be two basic and conflicting evaluations of the personal. In other words, the personal as it is understood within the Christian tradition, cannot be treated, likewise, as an essential category in Hindu thought.

Although the question of the personal has played a different role in Hindu thought from that which it has played in Christian, yet it has been made the subject of considerable philosophical scrutiny and it may, therefore, be of interest to Christian philosophers of religion to study the way in which the conception of the personal has been dealt with from a philosophical point of view within an alien religious context.

Shankara and Rāmānuja are ideal examples to take for this sort of discussion. They share a common background, common assumptions and common aims and yet they differ on issues which are vital to religion and which can be given a philosophical treatment.

They are both, of course, Hindus. They, therefore, to a very large extent share a common tradition of beliefs and practices. Both were devout practitioners and missionaries of their faith, travelling the length and breadth of India, debating with rival schools and founding monastories. Both were philosophers or philosophical theologians, i.e. they were concerned to give a reasoned account, explanation and justification of their faith. As philosophers and Hindus they shared the belief that the most important religious and philosophical enquiry that could be made was the enquiry into the nature of ultimate reality. This enquiry was not merely ontological in nature, for the ultimately

real was equated with the ultimate in value. The starting point for this enquiry was the scriptures and in particular the Prasthānatraya, comprising the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma Sūtras by Bādarāyana, all of which were regarded as authoritative by both. The Brahma Sūtras, or Vedānta Sūtras, as they are often called, are a highly condensed and systematic account of the contents of the Upanishads which are intended to explain the various doctrines contained in these scriptures. The condensation and systematisation has proceeded to such an extent, however, that they are well-nigh unintelligible without a commentary. One of the main preoccupations of later Hindu philosophers was that of writing commentaries on the Brahma Sūtras.

Other presuppositions which were shared by Shankara and Rāmānuja were the belief in samsāra, i.e. the transmigration of the individual soul from one life to another as a result of its ignorance of the true nature of things : this belief was linked to the belief that the phenomenal world of nature consisted of an eternal cycle which had neither beginning nor end and which was composed of vast cycles of creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe : the belief in karma, the causal, moral law of the universe which shapes the destiny of the individual soul in accordance with its deeds, each action producing its appropriate effect : the conviction that the end of life is moksha or liberation from samsāra and the law of karma : and, finally, the belief that the way to achieve liberation was by means of knowledge. This background of thought and belief was presupposed as axiomatic by both thinkers, i.e. discussion might be, and was, carried on over the precise interpretation of the doctrines, but the doctrines themselves were not considered to stand in need of independent justification.

My choice of Shankara as a major expositor of Hindu thought might be criticised on the grounds that central issues in his philosophy have been agreed by scholars to have been influenced by contemporary Buddhist teachings. Does this invalidate his importance to the Hindu tradition? This is not such a problem as it may appear. Two points may be made. In the first place, Shankara and Rāmānuja were chosen for this study because they are the two traditional exponents of issues that are alive in contemporary Indian thought. Philosophy in India has always had a practical motivation, for example, to show that the world is such that moksha is possible. In the past moksha has generally been conceived in other-worldly terms. In contemporary Hindu circles the economic and social development of this world have assumed a larger importance and the problem has become that of showing that the traditional metaphysics is capable of providing a justification for what may seem a different ethical outlook. In particular, the problem of the 'other' becomes crucial. Unless the other person is recognised as important and worthy of love then programmes of social service become meaningless. This links up with the issue of monism versus theism and Shankara and Rāmānuja are the obvious choice as expositors of classical Vedānta philosophy. From this point of view the question of Shankara's indebtedness to Buddhism becomes irrelevant, as however he may have been influenced by Buddhist thought, his teachings have certainly formed a main part of Hindu thought since. This is borne out by the fact that thinkers like Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan have felt a need to consider and to reinterpret what he says.

The second point to be made is this : granted that Shankara was influenced to a major extent by Buddhist thought, yet this influence is not so alien as might at first appear. Buddhism took root on the same soil as Hinduism and sprang up as a reaction to some of the more

conservative elements of Hinduism. Both religions share common beliefs such as the belief in reincarnation, in the law of karma, and in the possibility of release from empirical existence. Although certain aspects of Shankara's thought had undoubtedly been previously developed in a similar manner by Buddhist philosophers, yet the seeds of both doctrines may be traced back to the Upanishads, where they coexist with all the other views which were being discussed at that period.

The Conception Of The Personal In Christian Thought

We have already mentioned some basic differences between the Hindu and the Christian viewpoints. In the Christian tradition it has generally been assumed that God is personal in some way, whereas in Hinduism the nature of the ultimate reality, Brahman, is a matter for debate. In the following pages we shall trace the historic development of the conception of the personal in Christianity and will come to see that the question of interpersonal relationship is central. Man only comes into his own as a person in terms of his relationship with God and with his fellow men. In contrast, the Hindu ideal may be described as that of self-realisation which makes the values of the interpersonal redundant. One can put the point by saying that in Christianity one comes to the meaning of life through relationships - with God and with other people : in Hinduism the significance of life is realised by delving ever deeper into one's own nature.

In spite of these broad differences of approach, when we come to examine the picture on each side in a little more detail, we find subtle differences in the overall view which make the opposing pictures rather more complex and lead them to show more of a resemblance to each other than might at first appear to be the case. There is a vigorous theistic strain in Hinduism which though in general subordinated philosophically

to monism, does draw attention to the importance of bhakti (devotion) and, therefore, to the relationship between the worshipper and God. In the case of Christianity, the traditional definition of a person did not make any reference to the necessity of interpersonal relationship and indeed defines 'person' in such a way as to make the possibility of interpersonal relations doubtful and even unnecessary to the life of a person.

The Personal In The Old And New Testaments[1]

It was a common presupposition with writers of both the Old and New Testaments that God's nature was such that personal relationships were possible between man and God. In the Old Testament God confronted His people, spoke to them and demanded unconditional obedience from them. The Old Testament writers had a profound sense both of the collective responsibility of the nation before God and of the responsibility of the individual to God. Eichrodt describes the history of Israel as having the character of a struggle for a direct relationship with God.[2] Speaking of the effect which the preaching of the prophets had on the life of the nation he says,

'..... the fundamental datum of Israel's view of life is that the individual is summoned to responsibility which demands to be taken as absolute ..... here a view of personality is more and more clearly established which has nothing to do with an animistic theory of an indestructible soul substance.'[3]

1 See C.C.J. Webb, God & Personality, Allen & Unwin, 1919.
John Baillie, Our Knowledge Of God, London, O.U.P., 1939. : And The Life Everlasting, New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1933. : Invitation To Pilgrimage, London, O.U.P., 1942.
H.R. Mackintosh, The Christian Apprehension of God, London, S.C.M. Press, 1929.
L. Eichrodt, Man in the Old Testament, Translated by K. & R. Gregor Smith, London, S.C.M. Press, 1951.

2 Eichrodt, Op. Cit., Ch. 1, Sect. 3. 3 Ibid. p.23

In the New Testament the Incarnation doctrine brought a fresh and deeper understanding of the conviction that the life of man derived its meaning and value from obedience to a personal God. The consciousness of being redeemed into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ had various aspects : on the one hand, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were seen as the means by which the relationship between God and man was restored, and on the other hand, a consideration of the relationship of Christ to God led to the belief that the life of the Godhead was social in character. Paul, for example, speaks of Christians as being sons of God by adoption.[1]

From the foregoing emerge two points which in the Old and New Testaments are firmly linked with the conviction of the personal nature of God. The one concerns the value of the individual within the framework of the community and the importance of fellowship, and the other concerns the connection of personal value with morality and the understanding of the moral life. I shall comment further on each of these.

The relation of the individual to the community may be seen in a number of ways. The whole value of the individual may be seen as intrinsic to himself, and the community as external to him and, therefore, of little importance when considering the meaning and significance of the life of the individual. Or the values of the individual may be seen as strictly subordinate to and dependent on the life and purpose of the community as a whole. Between these two extremes lie a great number of possibilities in which the relative values of individual and community are balanced against each other in different degrees. There is yet another possibility, however, and that

1 See L. Hodgson, The Doctrine of the Trinity, Nisbet & Co., London, 1943, Lecture 2.

is that the values of the individual and the community are strictly correlative and complementary to each other, and it is this possiblity which seems to be implied by the Old and New Testament understanding of the personal nature of God.

In the Old Testament the sense of both individual and collective responsibility flourished together and while the prophets summoned the individual to repentance they also emphasised that the repentance and obedience of the individual was closely bound up with God's purpose for the nation as a whole. In the New Testament the immediate result of conversion was the creation of a new way of life for the believers in which 'they had all things common'.

Baillie[1] emphasises, when discussing the question of the after-life, that the Bible is not concerned with the immortality of the individual soul or with the individual merely as an individual : it is rather concerned with the end and destiny of the community. When discussing the role of the Church in the Christian life he points out that Christianity is essentially a community affair for it is only in a community that a person can be born and develop, and that he can develop fully only in a community where the individual has a sense of the universal bearing of his life. He sums it up thus :

'the Christian religion is a relation between the individual soul and God, but it is a relation which can be real only within that universal community which is the Church of Christ.'[2]

It might be objected that if the emphasis on the regeneration of the community is really implicit in Christian faith, then the Church has been curiously slow to recognise it and has too often accepted social

1 Invitation to Pilgrimage, Ch. XIII

2 Ibid. p.119

and political evils with complacence. Baillie admits the justice of this claim[1] and grants that Christians have frequently acquiesced too readily in an existing political and social order. In mitigation, however, he points out that Christians have always been ready to extend sympathy and succour to the oppressed. The contrast is not really between accepting a social order and seeking to change it, but between relying on love and charity or relying on legislation to change society. The Church has traditionally chosen the former means and sought to reform society by reforming the individual members.

In the Old Testament the personal relationship which God sought to establish with His people was seen to demand loyalty and obedience on the part of the nation which showed itself in an adherence to strict standards of conduct. In the New Testament, as we have already noted, the life of the Christian found its expression in participation in a community in which new standards of behaviour were spontaneously adopted. The emphasis on fellowship and the emphasis on morality are closely linked, for morality was understood in the context of the Christian's relationship to God.

The Christian Doctrine Of A Personal God

Although the writers of the Old and New Testaments regarded it as a presupposition of their religious experience that the God with whom they were dealing was personal in nature, the actual doctrine of the personal nature of God was a gradual development and its formulation was influenced to a considerable extent by Greek philosophical theology. Further, the original interest of Christian theologians lay with the question of personal relations within the Godhead and the doctrine of the personal nature of God came later.

1 Ibid.

The word 'person' as has frequently been pointed out, is derived from the Latin 'persona' which referred to the mask donned by the actor in a drama. From this the term came to be used to designate a being who had a part to play in some form of social intercourse. Later on, 'persona' came to be used by theologians as equivalent to 'hypostasis' which referred to something having real concrete existence as opposed to being a mere appearance with no substantial foundation; and these terms were used to designate the distinctions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the Trinity. It is from this that the notion of personality <u>in</u> God developed.

The term 'personality' may be confusing as its meaning has changed over the years. In modern use it suggests those particular characteristics which distinguish one person from another, in other words, a set of characteristics which are peculiar to one individual. This contrasts with its traditional use which was to refer to the general characteristics which distinguished certain individuals as persons from other non-personal beings. Thus traditional theologians talked about personality in or of God where modern discussion would prefer the terms 'personal nature' or 'personal characteristics'.

The distinction between 'person' and 'individual' is also important. A person is an individual but not all individuals are persons; personality or personal characteristics, may belong to beings whom we should not naturally class as individuals.

It was because traditional theologians saw God as an individual, but not as a person, that they spoke of personality in God rather than the personality of God. It was possible to affirm personality in God because of the existence of personal relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the existence of personal relations

here did not imply that there were three separate persons or individuals, and originally the assertion that God was a person had a use only to contradict the view that He was three persons.

In the 6th century AD Boethius gave the classical definition of a person as 'an individual subsistence of a rational nature'. Webb points out that this definition has two aspects, that of individual subsistence which is representative of the term 'hypostasis' and that of rational nature which is representative of the term 'persona'; from the time of Boethius on, the meaning of 'person' oscillated between that of an 'independent and fundamentally unchangeable individual' (hypostasis) and the 'thought of social relationships and voluntary activity' (persona).[1]

The distinction between these two aspects of 'person' represents the distinction between the God of Hebrew theology and the God of Greek philosophical theology.[2] The former was personal in the sense of being a conscious, intelligent being, directly in control of the events of this world in which He is working out His purposes : the latter was also personal so far as the self-contemplation in which His life consisted was conscious, intelligent activity. But He was not personal in the sense of being in touch with the events of space and time because this would disturb His changelessness. One implication of this is that ethical predicates are strictly inapplicable to a God such as that of Aristotle, whose life consists in the contemplation of his own excellence, and is thereby outwith the possibility of a personal relationship with his creatures, if such they may be called.

1 See C.C.J. Webb, Op. Cit., Lecture 2.

2 See L. Hodgson, Op. Cit., Lecture 5.

Summing up the foregoing we find that the term 'person' as it occurs in Christian thought has two aspects. On the one hand it may be used primarily to designate an intelligent, independent, self-conscious being and on the other, it may be used to indicate that the being so termed is capable of voluntary, purposeful activity and of entering into social relationships with other beings of the same nature. An examination of the development of Christian thought has shown that it has been the latter aspect of the meaning which has been of prime significance in Christian experience. Expressing this more technically we can say that the Christian conception of the personal is of a subject who is not primarily a knower but an agent : an agent who not only acts on things which are not themselves agents, but, and this is of the utmost importance, who interacts in a unique way with beings who are themselves agents. It is in terms of this interaction which makes fellowship possible and implies such qualities as love, trust, obedience, forgiveness, thankfulness, and which gives rise to a distinctive understanding of the moral life, that the value of the personal within the Christian tradition must be understood.

Persons And Personal Relationship

It may be asked how a personal relationship can be possible without the individual participants in the relationship being themselves persons. Unless God is regarded as a person how can there be a personal relationship between man and God? This question troubled the Idealists[1] of the 19th century and they raised the question of personality in relation to the Absolute. The major issue is whether personality, or as we should prefer to say nowadays, a personal nature, which in our case is predicated of finite individuals and seems to

1 See J.E. McTaggart, Studies in Hegelian Cosmology, Cambridge University Press, 1918.

imply and to presuppose the existence of other similar finite individuals, can be predicated of God who is infinite and over and against which there is no other.

McTaggart sums up the matter :

'What ..... is meant by personality? ..... The nature of an infinite and perfect being must be very different from mine. And within what limits must this difference be confined, if that infinite and perfect being is to be called a person?'[1]

'The consciousness of the non-Ego is not personality. But is it not an essential condition of personality?'[2]

On the one hand there are those who argue that to be a person is to be finite because a self must have a not-self over and against it. It follows, therefore, that God cannot be a self or person. On the other hand it is possible that we are wrong in attempting to transfer our human limitations to God and that we are persons in a second-rate fashion as compared to Him. Lotze, for example, says

'Perfect personality is in God only; to all finite minds there is allotted but a pale copy thereof; the finiteness of the finite is not a producing condition of the Personality, but a limit and a hindrance of its development.'[3]

One possible reply to the assertion that God cannot be a self or person because He cannot have a not-self over and against him is to argue that it is not strictly true that God does not have a not-self. Mackintosh and Hodgson[4] point out that while there can be no 'other' over and against an Absolute such as Hegel's, this does not hold true of the Christian God who does not contain everything as a part of Himself.

1 Op. Cit. p.57.

2 Ibid. p.68.

3 Lotze, Microcosmos, Bk.IX; Ch.IV.

4 Opera Cit.

The created world is not a part of God. In the idealist metaphysics reality is a systematic whole within which the space-time universe of our experience has a necessary existence in relation to the whole as an expression of the Absolute. In contrast, for Christian thought the space-time universe is not a medium through which God finds expression in order to be Himself; it is not internal to the eternal being of God, but was created by God for a purpose and as such has a relative independence of God.

Another line of reply is to question the assumption of the sceptics who regard finiteness and exclusiveness as essential features of the person. MacMurray takes the view that universality and individuality are the key features of personality and that these terms are correlative.

'The more universal a person becomes in his self-transcendence, the more unique does he become in his individuality. There is, therefore, no ground for hesitation in ascribing personality to God. Absolute personality, in terms of our analysis, must involve absolute universality and absolute individuality at once ..... The transcendence of God is His unique individuality; His immanence is his abolute universality; and these are, therefore, not peculiar characteristics of Deity, but the fundamental characteristics of all persons carried to their infinite limit. What is human love but the immanence of one human personality in another? Yet it does no violence to the unique individuality, the transcendence, of either ..... the idea that the supreme reality is an infinite person is not self-contradictory.'[1]

On this view the salient feature of personality or the characteristic of the personal is its inclusiveness rather than its exclusiveness and although contact with others may enable us to come to know our personality it is not such contact which constitutes it.

1 Adventure, ed. B.H. Streeter, London, Macmillan, 1927, pp.193-194.

MacMurrays's viewpoint is consonant with the Christian belief that the believer stands in a personal relationship to God. The assertion that God is personal, meaning that the believer can stand in a personal relationship with Him, does not imply that God has personal characteristics in the same degree and kind, as do human persons. An analysis of personal relationship on the human level reveals that personal relationships between equals, i.e. between persons exhibiting personal characteristics in the same degree, are comparatively rare. More often there is inequality between the partners. Take the case of mother and baby. It is only through a personal relationship with his mother that the baby has the possibility of growing up to be a mature person. In the initial stages the whole of the relationship must be maintained by the mother and she must contribute everything to it while the baby apparently is simply on the receiving end. At later stages of life there are many other examples of personal relationships where the inequality of the two partners is not so pronounced, but is nevertheless unmistakeably present. If this line of thought is pursued we come to the conclusion that just as the fact that the baby is limited in his responses does not preclude his participating in a personal relationship with his mother, so the limitations and finitude of man do not prevent him from entering a relationship with a God who is unlimited and infinite. The difficulty arises only because we falsely imagine that the personal characteristics possessed by God must correspond to those possessed by us.

The Self In Hindu Thought

We have seen in the preceding section that within the Christian religious context 'personal' is the highest evaluative category. God is apprehended as personal, i.e. as a being who takes an intelligent, purposeful interest in the events of this space-time world and who

interacts with men 'not for a time but always, not with some, but with ideal wisdom, not with a mixture of love, hate and indifference, but with unsurpassable love for all.'[1] It is within this context of a unique relationship with God that man is understood as a person.

One of the consequences of this understanding of 'person' is that there is little discussion from the religious viewpoint of what it is to be a person or of the nature of a person as such. In fact, Christian theologians seem to be characteristically vague about what may be called the ontological status of the person. This is because it is the nature of the relationship between God and man which is fundamental and any special features which may belong to the terms of the relation are of no special interest in themselves, but only in so far as they contribute to the nature of the relationship.

Is there any similar situation in Hinduism? The answer is 'no' because here we find that, central in theological controversy, is continuous, lively discussion as to the precise nature of the self. The Upanishads abound with questions about and descriptions of the self; for example,

'The Ātman (self) is not born, nor dies. This one has not come from anywhere, has not become anyone. Unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this one is not slain when the body is slain.'[2]

'More minute than the minute, greater than the great, is the Self that is set in the heart of a creature here.'[3]

1 Hartshorne, Abstract and Concrete Approaches to Deity, Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. XX, No.3, March, 1965, p.267.

2 Katha Upanishad, 11.18. R.E. Hume, The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, London, O.U.P., 1931.

3 Ibid. Katha Upanishad, 11.20.

While the question of the nature of the self was of paramount importance to the Upanishadic thinkers there was no single account of the self which was accepted by all. The most general term used to refer to the self was 'ātman'. 'Ātman' may be used simply as a reflexive pronoun. Ninian Smart gives in addition to 'self' the translations 'spirit', 'eternal self' and 'World-Spirit'.[1] R.C. Zaehner[2] is in agreement with the translation 'immortal soul' but points out that on occasion 'ātman' may also be translated as 'ego' or as 'animal soul' or 'lower self'. Another term which may sometimes be regarded as virtually identical with 'ātman' is 'purusha'. This means literally 'man', 'person' or 'human being'. It is also used to designate the world soul. At the beginning of the Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad it is used to refer to the original, primeval man out of whom the world is said to evolve, in much the same manner as it is imagined in Plato's myth in the Symposium. In the Sāmkhya system purusha, conscious spirit, is one of the first principles, the other being prakṛti, matter. Rāmānuja refers to God as Purushottama, meaning the supreme person. Purusha as the eternal element in living beings is translated as 'soul' by Smart[3] while Edgerton and other translators prefer the term 'spirit', reserving the terms 'soul' and 'self' for 'ātman'.

By the time of Shankara and Rāmānuja discussion of the self is carried on against a background of more or less agreed technical description of the various powers and faculties of man. Subtle distinctions are drawn which are intended to be verifiable in experience. These

1 Ninian Smart, Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy, quoted by E.G. Parrinder, Recent Views of Indian Religion and Philosophy, Religious Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, October, 1965, p.110.

2 R.C. Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, quoted Ibid.

3 Ibid, p.111.

technicalities are hinted at in the Upanishads, but only fully developed by later writers. For example, in the Katha Upanishad we get the famous comparison of the self to a charioteer :

Know thou the ātman as riding in a chariot, the body as the chariot. Know thou the intellect (buddhi) as the chariot-driver, and the mind as the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses; the objects of sense, what they range over. The self combined with senses and mind wise men call "the enjoyer".'

Later on in the same section we get an ascending gradation of objects which leads to the Self which is not regarded as an object at all :

'Higher than the senses are the objects of sense. Higher than the objects of sense is the mind; and higher than the mind is the intellect (buddhi). Higher than the intellect is the Great Self (Ātman). Higher than the Great is the Unmanifest (avyakta). Higher than the Unmanifest is the Person. Higher than the Person there is nothing at all. That is the goal. That is the highest course. Though he is hidden in all things, that Self shines not forth.'[1]

Shankara, in a typical passage in the Upadeshasāhasri, distinguishes the Self (ātman) from the sense-organs, the organs of action (the larynx, the hand, etc.), the mind (manas), and the intellect (dhī). It is the confusion of the self with any of these that obscures the recognition of its true nature and so prevents moksha or self-realisation. For present purposes it will be sufficient if we consider the mind and the intellect in relation to the self. Shankara refers to these as 'mental modifications' (vṛttis). We shall see that the important distinction philosophically is that drawn between the self and the 'mental modifications'. Devaraja discusses this point.[2]

A vṛtti is a modification of the internal organ, the internal organ comprising the instruments of knowledge such as manas and buddhi, and

1 Katha Up. III. 3-4, 10-12.

2 An Introduction to Shankara's Theory of Knowledge, pp.97-99.

by the time of Shankara, the distinction of the various components, as it were, of the internal organ, were less important than the distinction of the internal organ from the self; and so the internal organ, as Devaraja notes, was variously known as antahkarana, manas, buddhi, vijñāna, citta and hṛdaya. It was regarded as constituting the 'upādhi', or limiting condition of the Absolute. Shankara regarded all mental processes, intellectual as well as emotional, as modifications or vṛttis of the internal organ.

'The self which is of the nature of pure awareness is said to have the modes of the internal organ for its objects which latter it illumines. The pure awareness is designated by the Vedantists as Sākṣi or Sākṣijñāna, while knowledge in its changing aspect is called Vṛttijñāna.'[1]

On the next page Devaraja says

'The internal organ with its modes is avabhāsya (that which is illumined), while the light of the self is the avabhāsaka or the illuminer ..... Pure cit or awareness ..... since it illumines the modes of the buddhi, appears to be active when in reality the latter is active. There can be no real movement or activity in the light that is Ātman.'[2]

It is usual in Western philosophical thinking to distinguish simply between the mind and the body. For example, Descartes distinguishes between mental or spiritual substance which possessed the qualities of consciousness, thought and intelligence and which had no extension, and material substance which possessed the quality of extendedness, and lacked consciousness and the ability to think. Traditionally, man has been thought to be a trinity of body, mind and soul, but for philosophical purposes the soul is usually either equated with the mind or ignored. For example, Descartes in treating the question of

1 Op. Cit. p.98. 2 Op. Cit. p.99.

the relationship between mind and body asks if the soul is lodged in the body like a pilot in a ship. On this showing, questions about the nature of the self or soul become questions about the mind. So that rationalist thinkers supposed that reflection on the cogito yielded the knowledge that the self was a simple substance, and an empiricist like Hume declared that in reviewing the contents of his consciousness he could find nothing but a constantly changing stream of perceptions and no continuing perception of the self from which he could derive the idea of personal identity.

It is important to realise that the Hindu analysis proceeds on different lines. The distinction is broadly speaking, threefold, body, mind and self, with body and mind very firmly on one side of the line and the self on the other. The mind (manas) can in no sense be equated with the self which is pure consciousness. Manas, on the other hand, it is agreed by almost all schools of Indian philosophy, is a subtle kind of matter. It is capable of reflecting the nature of the self which is pure consciousness and, therefore, acts as a kind of link between gross matter and consciousness.

Manas may be described as the totality of the conscious states and activities that make up our mental life. It is manas which feels desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, which has intelligence, knowledge, which can range over past, present and future, which makes decisions, which values things, which doubts, which includes, in short all our mental activities. Manas is also responsible for our sensory knowledge. The mind co-ordinates the perceptions of the senses and without the co-operation of the mind we should not have perceptions at all. For example, the Bṛhādaranyaka Upanishad concludes that it is more correct to say that we perceive with the mind rather than perceive

with the senses.

'People say my mind was elsewhere; I did not see. My mind was elsewhere; I did not hear. It is with the mind, truly, that one sees. It is with the mind that one hears .....'

Shankara takes this argument to prove that knowledge is entirely dependent upon the mind's attention to the object which is being perceived. Unless there is attention, there will be no awareness of the object. Negatively, then, this argument proves, that as there is sometimes awareness of objects, mind must exist and it must be the most important requirement for knowledge. To most Indian writers the existence of manas is arrived at by inference in this way.

The account of manas as being responsible for the co-ordination of our sense-perceptions bears a resemblance to Aristotle's conception of the sensus communis, which was also held to be responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the various senses.

Manas, then, is always regarded as an <u>instrument</u> for obtaining knowledge (cf. Shankara : 'As the mind is an object of consciousness and an instrument like a lamp it also is not the Ātman.)[1]
and never as the <u>agent</u> who attains the knowledge. It is the self which uses manas as an instrument for the attainment of knowledge and the self is able to use manas because manas is able to reflect some of the intelligence which belongs to the true nature of the self as pure consciousness.

(e.g. Shankara : 'Just as light assumes the forms of objects revealed by it, but is really different from, though (apparently) mixed up with, them, so, the Self is different from the mental modifications whose forms it assumes while revealing them.')[2]

1 Shankara, <u>Atmajñānopadeshavidhi</u>, v.10.

2 <u>Upadeśasahasri</u>, xvi, 5.

But manas in its own nature is material and unconscious. On this account of mind, recognition and memory are accounted for because manas, being material, is able to retain traces of every thought and action and it is these traces, samskara and vasana, which account for the continuity of our knowledge and experience. It is also these mental traces which record every person's dharma and so make possible the operation of the law of karma and so ultimately the endless cycle of rebirths.

In some respects, Kant's distinction between consciousness and the contents of consciousness in his account of the transcendental unity of apperception, may be useful in throwing light on this account of the relation between self and the mind. It seems to be this distinction to which the Vedāntins are drawing attention when they say that the self is pure consciousness and the mind is a subtle material which is able to reflect some of the nature of consciousness, and that the self is the knowing subject and manas is simply the instrument of knowledge. But whereas Kant stressed that the unity of consciousness is simply the unity of consciousness and that the attempt to make use of this unity in order to gain further knowledge of the nature of the self was futile, Hindu thinkers want to go on and say something more about the self.

The intellect or buddhi is also an instrument rather than an agent, in the same manner as manas. While manas, I have suggested, is a kind of sensus communis, it is the buddhi which is responsible for our being able to make inferences and in general for our having the power of discursive thought. The buddhi is closely connected with the self though it must always be distinguished from it.

'Always illumining the all-pervasive intellect by its light, Its own

nature, the Self is called the Knower ..... The Self illumines the intellect ..... like a stationary lamp devoid of any effort and illumining everything within its reach.'[1]

As we have seen the psychological distinctions drawn within Hindu epistemology are rather different from those noted in the West. A failure to distinguish clearly between the mind or intellect and the self may lead to considerable confusion.

We come now to some terms which are more directly relevant to our subject.

Jīva is the general term in the Vedānta terminology which is used to denote the empirical self rather than the real self or atman. In some other systems such as Jainism the term 'jīva' is used instead of 'ātman' to denote the self, but it is the Vedānta usage which primarily concerns us here. Whereas ātman designates the true and fundamental nature of the self, 'jīva' refers to the phenomenal self as it is bound to the recurring cycle of transmigratory existence. In contrast to the ātman, the jīva is changing and is subject to the law of karma which affects it in accordance with the deserts which it has incurred in this life and in previous existences. The distinguishing feature of the jīva, which makes it what it is, is that it fails to realise that its true nature (ātman) is different from the mental modifications and objects with which it has mistakenly identified itself and this is why the jīva cannot escape the law of karma.

Another important term is cit (consciousness). For Shankara, cit is identical with ātman, the ātman <u>is</u> cit and this seems to be a mathematical identity, i.e. cit and ātman are one and the same.

1 Shankara, <u>Upadesasahasri</u>, xvi.4, 6.

Rāmānuja, on the other hand, distinguishes clearly between cit and the subject which possesses cit. Cit is an essential characteristic of the self and presupposes the self, but is not identical with the self. This, as we shall see, is an important point of difference between them. Other terms are also used interchangeably to designate consciousness. For example, Rāmānuja says

'This consciousness (anubhuti) which is also termed jñāna, avagati, samvid, is a particular attribute belonging to a conscious Self and related to an object.'[1]

As Shankara identifies cit and the ātman, he regards cit as eternal : for Rāmānuja, however, consciousness has a beginning and an end.

Ahamkāra is another interesting term. It is sometimes translated 'ego-complex' or 'I-consciousness'. Once again, it is to be distinguished from the self and can be understood as the wrong notion of the self which is obtained by mistakenly identifying oneself with the internal organ or the body. In connotation it seems rather like the jīva in that both terms are the result of the misidentification of the true self, but whereas jīva is a general term referring to the transmigratory self in all its aspects, the ahamkāra is the specific notion which an individual has of himself as a result of faulty introspection. In practice it is included in the notions of manas, buddhi and the antahkarana.

Sthitaprajña And Sākṣin

The concepts of sthitaprajña (the man of steady understanding) and of

1 Vedānta Sūtra Bhāsya, 1.1, Translated by Thibaut, Clarendon Press, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 4B.
Unless otherwise stated all future quotations from Rāmānuja's commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras will be from this translation.

sākṣin are of great ethical importance. They emphasise the non-involvement with the empirical world which strikes the Westerner as a characteristic feature of Hindu thought. It is certainly a feature of Shankara's account of the self in its classical interpretation. One of the questions to be considered in this study is whether Rāmānuja's insistence that the self is a conscious directing agent rather than sheer consciousness does anything to modify this fundamental attitude.

The concept of sthitaprajña is first elaborated and clarified in the Bhagavad-Gītā.

The Bhagavad-Gītā attempts a synthesis of several different strands of thought and the concept of sthitaprajña is central in the reconciliation of apparently incompatible ideas. Chief of these is the synthesis of action and knowledge. On the one hand the life of action involves an acceptance of manyness and differentiation, and on the other, the knowledge of Brahman, the supreme reality is a knowledge in which there can be no element of differentiation. In acting a man is inevitably bound to the wheel of karma and further action whereas knowledge of supreme reality must involve the transcending of action altogether. The Gītā reconciles these opposites in the concept of the sthitaprajña. The man of steady understanding adopts the transcendental standpoint, the standpoint of the divine. Consequently, although he must continue to act, he no longer is motivated by egocentric considerations. He acts without desire for the fruit of his actions. By so doing he is no longer bound by his actions and is able to attain Brahmisthiti, the divine state. In the divine state a person is never deluded and ultimately obtains moksha, the complete merging with Brahman. The sthitaprajña thus reconciles in his life the values of ethics and

mysticism. His life is characterised by a strict ethical discipline which leads eventually to the attainment of a state where ethical considerations are no longer relevant.

The Gītā gives the following descriptions of the man who has his thoughts fixed and steady :

'When a man puts away all the desires of his mind ..... and when his spirit is content in itself, then is he called stable in intelligence (sthitaprajña). He whose mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrows and is free from eager desire amid pleasures, he from whom passion, fear and rage have passed away - he is called a sage of settled intelligence. He who is without affection on any side, who does not rejoice or loathe as he obtains good or evil - his intelligence is firmly set. He who draws away the senses from the objects of senses on every side as a tortoise draws in his limbs into the shell - his intelligence is firmly set.'[1]

Linked with the concept of sthitaprajña is that of sākṣin, the witness-self. Sākṣin means observer or eye-witness and it is used in philosophy to designate the knowing subject. Shankara uses the term sākṣin to refer to cit, the underlying consciousness.

Summing up this section, we see that the Hindu and Christian approaches to the question of the personal are quite different. In Christianity, the question of the evaluation of personal characteristics, and derivatively of the person, occurs within the context of a religious experience of a relationship of man with God which displays certain unique features. Metaphysically we might say that the context of the question of the personal is that of action and in particular of <u>interaction</u>. In Hinduism the nature of religious experience is different and seems to be centered on reflection rather than action.

1 <u>Bhagavad-Gītā</u>, 11.54-58. Quoted in <u>History of Indian Philosophy</u>, Vol. 2, p.491, by S.N. Dasgupta, Cambridge University Press, 1932.

The context of evaluation is knowledge rather than action or interaction and, therefore, we get much discussion and analysis of the different aspects of personal experience, which is absent from Chritian thought. Corresponding to this, the notion of the 'Witness-self', the impassive, wisdom-filled observer, is the highest evaluative category.

The Conception Of Moksha

In the preceding section I said that the context of religious experience in Hinduism might be more appropriately described as knowledge or enquiry rather than action or interaction. This could be misleading, Paradoxically perhaps, Hindu religion is philosophical in character in that it emphasises the importance of knowledge; but Hindu philosophy is religious in character in that it presupposes a certain view of the end of life, and to this extent is essentially practical; enquiry is not simply for its own sake, but in order to further the achievement of the ideal prescribed by religion, which is moksha or liberation. The presupposition of moksha as the end and aim of life is perhaps the governing religious conception in Hinduism and, therefore, an important key to the Hindu understanding of the personal.

All the schools of Indian philosophy with the exception of the Carvakas or materialists accepted the ideal of moksha and held that the way to achieve it was through knowledge, and that the state of moksha which was the outcome of this knowledge was imperishable. Moksha was a presupposition which did not require independent justification, but which itself was used as a criterion for the acceptance or rejection of philosophical systems.

'Any metaphysical system which cannot interpret the universe in a way compatible with the possibility of moksha must be discarded. While refuting the views of the opponents, one of the favourite arguments which Shankara employs is to show that the theory in question fails to make room for liberation.'[1]

1 Devaraja, Op. Cit. p.54.

The importance of moksha as a presupposition of Hindu thought is also emphasised by S.S. Roy[2] :

'between the adverse critic of Advaita and Advaitism there is community of purpose, and identity of motifs. And the motif that unites two such antagonists takes its colouring from what we have ..... described as the morphological structure of the entire Indian philosophical consciousness. The adverse critics of the Advaita, as much as the Advaitins themselves, are oriented to a value, other than the one, found in the attitude that accepts the merely given. This value is freedom ..... Freedom ..... is central to Indian philosophy ..... Only its conceptual determinations vary. The variations in conceptual determinations of Freedom, reflect temperamental differences in the envisagement of this commitment in its metaphysical and logical aspects.'

Given that moksha is of central importance as a presupposition of Hindu thought, what are we to understand by it? There are variations in the way that it is interpreted. Devaraja distinguishes a negative and a positive element in its meaning and says that

'All Indian thinkers are one with regard to the negative conclusion that the state of release involves a complete freedom from the shackles of empirical existence. Differences on the positive side are mostly due to their differing conceptions of the nature of the Ātman.'[2]

Can we compare this conception of the state of moksha with anything similar in Christianity? Does, for example, the notion of the after-life hold a similar position to that of moksha? The answer seems to be no. In Hinduism moksha is a definite state to be aimed at, which, when once achieved, is final. There is no similar state of being to which the Christian's life is directed. Again there is a certain vagueness in the Christian account of the final outcome of things. The one thing positive that the Christian is left with is the assurance that all will be well : how this will come about or what it will consist in is not made clear

1 The Heritage of Shankara, pp.viii, ix. (Udayana Publs. Allahabad, 1965.)

2 Op. Cit. p.77.

except in highly metaphorical language. The reason for this, I suggest, is the same as the reason for the vagueness in the Christian account of the nature of a person : it is that these questions are not central to the Christian understanding of life. What is central is the relationship between God and man and it is this relationship which gives meaning to the Christian's present existence and it is the assurance of the continuance of the relationship which gives significance to any accounts of the after-life.

CHAPTER TWO - BRAHMAN

Introduction

In the first Chapter a complex picture started to emerge. Broadly speaking, the Christian emphasis is on relationship and the Hindu is on self-realisation. This is a reflection of the Christian idea of God as a loving Being, concerning Himself in the affairs of this world and of the Hindu view of ultimate reality as Pure Being, One without a second. Nevertheless, although each tradition differs in its major emphasis, yet they are not consistently different, and in fact we find common elements. In Hinduism, alongside strict mohism, there is a flourishing theism which emphasises God's concern for the world and the importance of the relationship between Him and His worshipper. In Christianity, although the main feature which has led Christian thinkers to a view of God as personal is His loving concern for the world, yet when Christian philosophers came to give expression to the nature of a person, the definition given, 'a self-subsistent entity of a rational nature', would equally fit Shankara's Brahman, a being of whom loving concern could certainly not be predicated.

As the conception of God is of paramount importance in Christian thought, so the conception of Brahman is vital to Hindu religious thought. In both, supreme reality and supreme value coincide. God is the One who was, before the heavens and the earth were created, and in creating them, He also endowed them with whatever importance and significance they may possess. Brahman, likewise, is the One, out of which the universe has evolved and into which it will return at the end of the age, from there to continue with the never-ending cycle of evolution and dissolution : thus it has always been extremely important to Hindu thinkers to explain the relationship of this present reality to

the ultimate reality. Van Buitenen, for example, declares that the fundamental problem of the Vedānta is to explain the relation between the first cause and the effected world.[1]

I have argued that the Christian conception of the personal nature of God has arisen directly out of the Hebrew-Christian experience of encounter with a God who demands personal obedience and who presents himself as the awareness of 'absolute demand' and 'final Succour'.[2] It is reasonable, then, to assume, that since the conception of Brahman is central to Hindu religious thought, the understanding of this conception will give a clue to the nature and importance of the conception of the personal in Hindu thought.

While there can be no doubt within the Christian tradition, that whatever else or more God may be, He is certainly personal in His nature and in His relationship to the world and to man, Brahman may or may not be regarded as personal. The term 'Brahman' functions much more in the manner of the expression 'the Absolute' as used by Western Idealist philosophers. It is equivalent to the ultimate principle of existence or the ultimate reality. As it was a matter of controversy amongst the Idealists whether or not the Absolute could be regarded as personal, (and thus as equivalent to the Christian God), so there is disagreement between Shankara and Rāmānuja over the fundamental nature of Brahman.

The question of the nature and character of Brahman is synonymous for Shankara and Rāmānuja with the question of the nature and character of ultimate reality or of the power of principle behind the universe. The essential difference between these thinkers concerns the personal character or otherwise of Brahman and the importance of this issue lies

1 Rāmānuja's Vedartha Samgraha, Deccan College Monograph Series, Poona, 1956.

2 H.H. Farmer, The World and God, Nisbet & Co., 1935, pp.23-25.

in the implications it has for the way of life and set of values adopted by the believer. Are 'personal' values better preserved within an overall framework of theism, or are they adequately accounted for by non-dualism or monism which is prepared to incorporate an aspect which is theistic? This is one of the important questions which this thesis attempts to elucidate.

An objector at this point might question the assumption that metaphysical beliefs can have ethical implications. Can this simply be taken for granted without discussion, especially in view of the vast amount of controversy in contemporary philosophy over the fact/value distinction?

My reply to this is fourfold. In the first place, the assumption that metaphysical beliefs may have ethical implications can be made without prejudice to the question of the autonomy of ethics. It can prevent no-one from holding ethical convictions which are unrelated to a set of metaphysical beliefs. Secondly, as we have already noted in Chapter One, although ethical questions may be considered in isolation from questions concerning the nature of the world as a whole, yet for the religious believer these issues cannot be kept apart. Since religion affects man's total life, each aspect of it must in some way colour the other aspects. Thus for the Christian, the way in which he conducts himself and the motivation for his actions can only be considered in the light of experience of and commitment to a personal loving God. This leads to the third point. Since the believer does view these issues as parts of an inter-related whole it is important, if what he says is to carry any weight with an outsider, that what he says should at least be consistent with itself. It is also important to examine the type of arguments used and the sort of conclusiveness which these arguments are capable of producing. Just as the Christian views his moral commitment from within

the framework of his commitment to a personal God, so Hindu non-dualists and theists wish to link up their metaphysical and moral beliefs and to show that the one provides the motivation for the other. It is a common feature of contemporary Vedāntism to argue that the only convincing motivation for universal love is the conviction of non-dualism. Before we can comment on the force of this argument we must examine the premisses from which it is taken to follow. The fourth point we have already touched on in the previous Chapter. The personal is essentially an evaluative conception. In a religious context the significance of the personal is determined by the nature of the religious experience which is central to the tradition in question. This means that an analysis of the religious consciousness gives rise to a view of the self which participates in this religious consciousness and the values that are taken to pertain to the self are also derived from the religious consciousness. Non-dualism and theism give rise to different accounts of the self and, therefore, to different evaluations of the personal.

History Of The Term 'Brahman'

H. de Witt Griswold distinguishes three interconnected lines of development of the use of the term 'brahman' in Pre-Upanishadic literature.[1] In the first place it was used to refer to the holy word. Different aspects of this tended to be emphasised in different collections of literature. In the Rg-Veda 'brahman' is used interchangeably with other words meaning 'hymn'. In this period, the essentials of Vedic worship were sacrifice and brahman : both were a means of 'quickening and strengthening the gods'.[2] In the Atharva-Veda the emphasis shifted to the potency of brahman as a magical formula or charm while in the Brahmanas, its sacredness, the result of its divine origin and antiquity, came to the forefront.

1 H. de Witt Griswold, Brahman, A Study in the History of Indian Philosophy, N.Y., The Macmillan Co., 1900. 2 Ibid. p.5.

Secondly, Brahman was used in a more 'subjective' sense to refer to the truth of the external word or to its inner content; and finally, we get the god Brahmanaspati (Lord of Brahman) or Bṛhaspati, who is the apotheosis of the power of the holy word. Brahmanaspati is described in such terms as 'the first born', 'the world order' and 'the self-existent'.

J. Gonda points out in agreement that

'Brahman is more and more regarded as the potency or principle from which all things are derived, as the ultimate basis of the world, as one with the true immortality and eternal reality'.[1]

Further, Gonda claims that

'its meanings or shades of meaning represent only facets or manifestatinns of an idea which is more general than "sacred word, stanza, hymn, rite, ritual, potency, etc." which is even more comprehensive than these objects added together ..... these objects are designated by the same name, because they all participate in or partake of that important and central concept.'[2]

Gonda sees the central meaning of brahman to be a power which manifests itself in various ways. He argues that in the early literature there is no sharp distinction drawn between the personal and impersonal, animate and inanimate aspects of this power. Brahmanaspati, the personal Lord of prayer, was simply a way of formulating the 'impersonal' aspect of divine power which was equally well represented by the neutral 'brahman'.

There has been much controversy over the etymology of 'brahman'. Gonda emphasises the arguments in favour of the root bṛh-bṛmbati - to exceed. The adjective 'bṛhat' from this root, generally has such meanings as 'firm, great, powerful, extensive'.[3] In this sense it is easily

1 J. Gonda, Notes on Brahman, Utrecht, J.B. Beyers, 1950, p.10.

2 Ibid., p.13. 3 Ibid., p.38.

seen to be applicable to the meanings which we have already considered for brahman in the pre-Upanishadic literature. In the context of Vedic literature the holy word, as described by Griswold is something that grants prosperity, that strengthens and that animates. And from being the power or potency behind the sacrifice, it comes to be regarded as the sustaining principle behind the universe.

'From being the subjective force which helped the seer to compose a prayer it came to mean the power of sacrifice, and since in the Brahmanas the whole universe is regarded as produced from sacrifice, the term came to signify the creative principle of the world.'[1]

Gonda's etymology agrees with that of Shankara and Rāmānuja, and the Mādhva school which followed Rāmānuja. The latter say that the etymological meaning of brahman is 'the entity in which there is a fullness of qualities.'[2]

By the time of the Upanishads, Brahman was definitely established as the ultimate reality or the principle behind the universe. One of the major themes of the Upanishadic writers was the enquiry into the nature of this ultimate support of the universe, the 'self-existent' or 'imperishable' and the attempt to relate the changing phenomenal world of everyday experience to the unchanging, imperishable Brahman.

The teachings of the Upanishads was summarised in aphoristic form by Bādarāyana in the Vedānta Sūtras. These sūtras, together with the Upanishads, provide the foundation for the philosophical systems of Shankara and Rāmānuja.

The Vedānta Sūtras themselves are written so concisely as to be wellnigh incomprehensible without the help of a commentary. Although

1 S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. 1, quoted by Gonda, Op. Cit.

2 Gonda, Op. Cit., p.20.

there is general agreement amongst Hindus that they contain the essence of Upanishadic teaching, there is less agreement as to what that teaching actually is. Shankara and Rāmānuja differ fundamentally over several vital points.

It would be agreed by most unbiased readers that it is impossible to make the teachings of the Upanishads consistent as they stand. Roughly speaking, older Upanishads such as the Bṛhadāranyaka and Chāndogya, from which Shankara frequently quotes, tend to favour a monistic doctrine where Brahman is the indescribable, not this, not this ,.... or, if he is described, it is in impersonal terms such as a mass of intelligence or the self-existent. Some of the later Upanishads, on the other hand, like the Śvetāśvatara, can scarcely be construed in other than monotheistic terms. Brahman is here described as the inner ruler and controller of the universe.

Shankara's method of interpretation has the great merit that it allows him to acknowledge and account for these differences in teaching in a consistent way. This he does by making a distinction between higher and lower knowledge. Lower knowledge (vyāvahārika satyam) is the knowledge of common-sense and everyday empirical experience. So long as we remain within this sphere, this knowledge is perfectly genuine. It leads us to acknowledge a multiplicity of selves and the existence of a supreme ruler and controller of the universe. Higher knowledge (paramārthika satyam) is that possessed by the knower of Brahman who has achieved moksha. In this state it is realised that there is nothing but Brahman. The supposition that there are finite selves and a personal ruler of the universe is seen to be ultimately an illusion (māyā), true only so long as one has not yet achieved knowledge of Brahman. In this way, Shankara is able to reconcile the texts which apparently preach theism, with

those that are monistic in content, by saying that in the former knowledge at the empirical level is being referred to, while in the latter it is knowledge on the transcendental level. Thibaut concludes of Shankara's method of interpretation that

'it is not only more pliable, more capable of amalgamating heterogeneous systems, but its fundamental doctrines are manifestly in greater harmony with the essential teaching of the Upanishads than those of other Vedānta systems.'[1]

On the other hand, Thibaut argues, the teaching of the Vedānta Sūtras themselves is almost undoubtedly theistic in intent and Rāmānuja, therefore, is the more faithful commentator as far as the sutras are concerned.[2]

These conclusions of Thibaut regarding the contents of the Upanishads and the Vedānta Sūtras are in conformity with our earlier findings concerning pre-Upanishadic literature. They suggest that from the earliest times there has been an ambivalence inherent in Hindu thought regarding the nature of the ultimate reality. The characterisation of the ultimately real as personal would seem to go back at least as far as the impersonal account. Perhaps one of the reasons why a personal theism did not take greater root was that a multiplicity of gods was always acknowledged and this made it difficult to accept any one god as supreme.

Although there is evidence that the tradition followed by Rāmānuja is just as ancient as that followed by Shankara, yet the most influential philosophical school has undoubtedly been the Vedānta of Shankara. Many orthodox Hindus insist that this is the only doctrine that is

1 Sacred Books of the East, Vol. IIIlV, Oxford, Clarenden Press, 1880, p.CXXlV. Unless otherwise stated all other quotations from Shankara's commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras will be from this edition.

2 Ibid.

taught in the scriptures. Vedānta has received additional support from the fact that Western educated Hindus at the beginning of this century found in it many points of similarity and comparison with Western forms of Idealism. Probably largely for this reason, it has frequently been Vedānta that has been expounded to the West by those Hindus who wished to make their religion and philosophy intelligible to the West and to show that it was in no way inferior to Western religion and philosophy.[1]

On the other hand, it must be said that the philosophical ideas of Shankara have never found favour with the mass of the Hindu people, who in actual practice have tended to adopt some form of theism. The nature of Hinduism seems to be such that it is capable of assimilating almost any kind of belief and practice, without undue regard for the consistency of so doing. Nevertheless, a great revolution is taking place in Hindu Thought at the moment. This has been largely precipitated by the advent of Independence and the creation of a secular democracy. It has become imperative to weld India into a single unit. This implies legislation on a national scale which will apply to every community. This has led to the realisation that many of the practices traditionally associated with Hinduism, such as caste and the joint family system with all its implications, are not of the essentials of the faith. This is leading to a reappraisal of Hindu thought. Its metaphysical and ethical assumptions are being re-examined and reaffirmed. It is hoped that a study such as the present, of the nature and importance of the conception of the personal, may help in casting some light on these questions for both Hindu and Christian thinkers.

1 Vedānta is not the only system which has sent missionaries to the West. There have also been various attempts to spread Yoga which relies for its philosophy on the Sāmkhya system.

Shankara's Account Of Brahman

As stated earlier, Shankara's method of interpretation allows him to impose consistency on the teachings of the Upanishads and to accommodate both personal and impersonal accounts of Brahman. He does this by distinguishing between a higher and a lower from of knowledge and a higher and a lower form of Brahman. The higher knowledge is of Brahman as he really is, nirguna (qualityless) Brahman : the lower knowledge is of the way Brahman appears to us as mediated by māyā (the world illusion or cosmic ignorance). Brahman remains eternally the same : he only appears to be other than he is because of our ignorance. A favourite illustration of this is that of the rope that is mistaken for a snake. At no time is there a snake present, but the onlooker, through false perception, imagines that there is, and this generates in him false fears, which vanish when he realises his mistake. In the same way, Brahman, which is an absolute unity, is mistakenly thought to have multiplicity. This is the effect of māyā. So long as the soul mistakenly identifies itself with part of this multiplicity which it perceives, it is subject to desire and passion. But once the realisation dawns that all is Brahman, all desires cease and the self becomes blissful in the knowledge of Brahman. Shankara describes the purpose of studying the Vedic texts as being that of freeing oneself 'from that wrong notion which is the cause of all evil and attaining thereby the knowledge of the absolute unity of the Self.'[1]

Māyā

The concept of māyā is of great importance.[2] Although the average Hindu accepts the doctrine of māyā as an attitude of baffled mistrust towards life, which sees life as intrinsically meaningless and

1 Vedānta Sūtras, 1.i.1, Translated by Thibaut, Op. Cit.

2 See Paul Devanandum, The Concept of Māyā, Lutterworth Press, 1950. J. Gonda, Four Studies in the Language of the Veda, Mouton & Co.'s Gravenhage, 1959.

sorrowful,[1] in its original use the term had no such connotation.

In the Rg-Veda it often refers to an incomprehensible power or wisdom which can only be ascribed to divine beings. Sometimes it may be used in connection with the marvels of nature and here 'māyā is the power, ability or capacity of achieving the marvellous'.[2] In other places the gods who are described as 'wise', 'knowing' or 'omniscient' are also said to possess māyā and this suggests that there may be a connection between the concepts of wisdom and māyā.

Gonda points out that the word 'dhīra', which may be translated as 'wise' or 'thoughtful', when it is used in the Rg-Veda, often refers to the technical skill or practical wisdom of divine beings. In the Atharva-Veda the term 'māyā' is associated with the adjective 'pracetas' (clever) which is applied to the asuras, a group of god-like beings, to whom is attributed creative power. Gonda describes the conception of māyā in this context as 'a power to create and achieve the marvellous.'[3]

It may be seen from this, that in its original sense māyā signifies a creative power rather than an illusory power as later came to be the case. The main emphasis which occurs in the early use of the term 'māyā', is on the marvellousness and wonder of creation. The fact that the early writers seem to be indicating by the use of the term 'māyā' is the wonder that there is anything there at all, and following on from this, awe and admiration at the nature of what <u>is</u> there. In other words, māyā is the concept which explains the inexplicable, i.e. the phenomenal world, the fact that there is anything there at all, that we do in fact exist in the manner that we do.

1 Devanandum, Op. Cit. 2 Gonda, Op. Cit., p.132. 3 Ibid. p.159.

Māyā And The Christian Doctrine Of Creation

A comparison may be drawn here with the Christian doctrine of God's marvellous creation of the world out of nothing. To say that the world is created by māyā, when māyā refers to 'the inexplicable power of a High Being to assume forms, to project itself into externality, to assume an outward appearance, to appear in, or as, the phenomenal world.'[1] is both as satisfactory and as puzzling an explanation of the existence of the world as to say that it was created by God out of nothing. Both explanations are really only attempts to describe what is the case and what is recognised to be essentially inexplicable. To say that the world is either the creation of God or the projection of a High Being are simply ways of conveying the awe and wonder felt before creation. To say that the High Being projects himself or that God creates out of nothing may add to our mental picture and increase our sense of awe and reverence in the face of nature, but they add nothing at all to our practical understanding of the existence of the world. In both cases also the reality of the phenomenal world is taken for granted and it is only in later Hindu literature that the idea of the world being an 'illusion' creeps in.

The fact that the term'māyā' began to be used in a greater variety of senses and gradually to assume the meaning of 'illusion' may have been due in part to the fact already noted, that there was in Hinduism no supreme, personal God. There were a great number of gods and each in so far as he was creative, had the power of māyā, but since none was supreme, the meaning of māyā did not become associated exclusively with the unique creation of a beneficient personal being, but was able to assume a variety of shades of meaning. For example, since māyā is

1 Ibid. p.128.

not associated exclusively with one supreme beneficient Being, it comes simply to refer to a miraculous power. Since power in itself is morally neutral we occasionally find it put to bad use, and so we come to find maya described as kapati (fraud, deceit).[1] For the same reason, i.e. that māyā is not associated with any one supreme Being, we find that 'men of uncommon qualities and achievements might also be credited with the faculty called māyā.'[2]

It is not difficult to see how when the question of the relation between the phenomenal world and ultimate reality came to assume fundamental importance for Hindu thought, the notion of māyā as the creative mysterious power of God was developed in two ways : it helped to reveal Ishvara, the Ruler and Lord of the universe to the world; and at the same time, it hid from the human mind the real nature of the individual's relation to the eternal Brahman.

It thus had two facets : on the positive side it functioned as the power of God, creating the world of 'name and form' for the human mind, and in its negative aspect, it acted as a veil or means of concealment, screening the real nature of Brahman from the world. Both aspects appear in Shankara's thought, but it is the negative side which tends to be emphasised. The world is māyā because it is like the illusion produced by the magician : it is simply a display having no substantial reality behind it.

In popular religious thought, māyā became personalised into the consort of god and symbolised the power or energy of god. Māyā was then the creative energy of god manifested in the world and the māyā-shakti (god's power or creative energy) cult became an integral part of

1 Ibid. p.127. 2 Ibid. p.160.

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popular worship. The sheer exuberance and positive delight in the manifold variety of life is perhaps best demonstrated in Hindu art and architecture.[1]

Anirvacanīya

One of Shankara's illustrations of māyā is the example of a man who sees the moonlight glinting on a shell on the beach and mistakes it for a bit of silver. But when he investigates it further he finds it to be only a shell. Here the object of perception is said to be anirvacanīya, which may be translated 'indefinable'.[2] The meaning is that it can neither be said to be real, nor to be unreal. (For example, 'Māyā ..... cannot be defined as that which is or that which is not.')[3] It cannot be real silver that appears in the perception for further investigation shows it to be a shell; but neither can the perception of silver be totally unreal, for the experience of silver is a fact of perceptual experience and what is unreal cannot be perceived. The silver is, therefore, said to be anirvacanīya.

We may infer from this example that when it is claimed that from the standpoint of ultimate reality the whole world is unreal or illusory, this does not mean that the world does not exist. To come to see that one's experience is illusory is to come to see that one has been wrongly describing it. In the light of further knowledge we realise that the silver is merely an appearance of the shell and could have no independent existence. Likewise, in the light of ultimate reality (Brahman), we realise that empirical experience is merely an aspect of

1 See H. Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation, Pantheon Books Inc., New York, 1946, for examples of this.

2 Literally this means 'indescribable'.

3 Vedānta Sūtra, 1.iv.1.

Brahman which we have hitherto been falsely thinking of and describing as being itself ultimate.

Shankara is emphatic that knowledge of Brahman shows empirical knowledge to be the product of ignorance. For example,

'Perception and other means of right knowledge, and the Vedic texts have for their object that which is dependent on Nescience.'[1] and

'the distinction of objects of activity and of agents may be practically assumed, as long as we have not learned ..... that the Self is one only. As soon, however, as we grasp the truth that there is only one universal Self, there is an end to the whole practical view of the world with its distinctions of bondage, final release and the like.'[2]

The one universal Self, the higher (nirguna) Brahman is described as

'eternal, all-knowing, absolutely self-sufficient, ever pure, intelligent, and free, pure knowledge, absolute bliss.'[3]

'it transcends speech and mind, does not fall within the category of objects.'[4]

'of the nature of intelligence, devoid of all differences ..... to be described only by denying of it all other characteristics.'[5]

This last description is typical of Shankara's account of Brahman. Brahman can in no sense be an object and so cannot have any predicates ascribed to it as if it were an object. Strictly speaking it is indefinable, 'beyond speech and mind', 'not this, not this .....'

Shankara discusses the question of the sense in which the higher Brahman can be talked about or described in his commentary on the Taittirīya Upanishad.[6] Here Brahman is described as satyam-jñānam-anantam (truth-knowledge-infinity).[7] Shankara explains that the sentence, Brahman

1 V.S.1.i.1 2 V.S.1.ii.6 3 V.S.1.i.4 4 V.S.3.ii.22 5 V.S.3.ii.18

6 Eight Upanishads with the Commentary of Shankaracarya, Vol. 1, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1965, Taittirīya Upanishad, 2.i.1.

7 Later Vedāntists often use the phrase sac cid anandam as a standard formulation to describe Brahman, but this wording does not seem to have been used by Shankara himself.

is truth, knowledge, infinity, is intended to distinguish Brahman from any other thing. If Brahman were simply an object amongst other objects, then these terms would be applied to Brahman as adjectives. For example, to describe a lotus as white rules out the possibility of its being blue or red.

'Ad adjective is meaningful when there are many nouns which belong to the same class and which are capable of having many adjectives.'[1]

But in the case of Brahman, there is only a single, unique Brahman. Any terms used to refer to Brahman, cannot, therefore, be understood simply as adjectives, but must be understood in a sense which distinguishes Brahman from everything else.

Shankara's difficulty would seem to be that Brahman is the term which denotes the totality of existence (as well as the supreme value). It is impossible to talk about the world as a whole in the same way that we can talk about objects within the world. For one thing, all talk about the world implies a standpoint within the world from which the relationship between objects in the world can be apprehended. To talk about the world as a whole, implies a standpoint that is outside the world. This is a logical impossibility, for we cannot conceive of anything apart from the world as whole to which the world as a whole could be related and so apprehended as a whole. But since Brahman denotes the supreme value, the realisation of which relates to moksha, there must be some way, however oblique, of referring to Brahman.

Shankara solves this problem by saying that the terms satyam-jñānam-anantam are primarily a means of distinguishing Brahman from what it is not. Further, each of these terms must be treated absolutely separately and not in conjunction with each other. Taken in conjunction, they would indicate limitations of various sorts on Brahman, which is not the case if they are treated separately.

1 Ibid.

The term satyam, true, is equivalent to real and a thing is real when it does not change its nature, and conversely, unreal when it does change its nature. So a pot is unreal in relation to the clay out of which it is made. The term satyam, when applied to Brahman, is intended to distinguish Brahman, the ultimately real and absolutely unchanging, from all unreal things.

The term 'jñānam' means knowledge. In its usual application, it would imply a knowing agent, but this cannot be the case in its application to Brahman. For Shankara, a knowing agent cannot be termed either true (i.e. absolutely real) or infinite. It cannot be absolutely real, since the absolutely real must be that which does not change, and a knowing agent must participate in change inasmuch as he passes from a state of not knowing to a state of knowing. Neither can a knowing agent be infinite since the infinite is that 'which is not separated from anything'[1] ; but a knowing agent must be separate from what is known and so must be finite. It follows from this, that the term 'jñānam', when applied to Brahman, can only indicate knowledge without the implication of there being an agent or subject who knows.

As we have already seen, the term 'anantam' (infinite), when applied to Brahman, rules out the possibility of Brahman being a knowing agent, as an agent must necessarily be limited.

The only one of these terms which denotes Brahman directly is the last, anantam. Brahman is infinite in time and space and hence omniscient :

'since all that exists is inalienable from Brahman in time and space ..... there is nothing else whether subtle or screened or remote or past, present or future which can be unknowable to it. Therefore, Brahman is omniscient.'[2]

1 Loc. Cit. 2 Ibid.

In contrast, Brahman is indicated, but not denoted, by the terms satyam and jñānam. They apply to Brahman only when understood in conjunction with anantam. The word 'jñānam' is only properly applicable to the knowledge that compartmentalises and objectifies : but Brahman is free from all such distinctions. Likewise, satyam which applies to external reality in general i.e. to something which contains distinctions, can only indirectly refer to Brahman, but cannot denote it.

Summing up Shankara's position with regard to the nature of nirguna Brahman, strictly understood it is absolutely indescribable, but it may nevertheless be indicated by the careful use of certain terms.

In contrast, Brahman in its lower form (saguna Brahman) is knowable as Ishvara, the supreme Lord and Ruler of the universe, the object of popular religious devotion. Shankara explains the distinction of the higher and lower Brahman by saying that Brahman is apprehended under two forms,

'as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form' and

'as being the opposite of this i.e. free from all limiting conditions whatever.'[1]

Brahman possesses a double nature, according as it is the object either of knowledge or of nescience.

'As long as it is the object of nescience, there are applied to it the categories of devotee, object of devotion and the like.'[2]

Nirguna And Saguna Brahman : Antithetical Or Complementary?

It has been suggested by Griswold that

The lower knowledge is concerned with the lower Brahman as the supreme concept of religion; while the higher knowledge is concerned with the

1 V.S. 1.i.11. 2 Ibid.

higher Brahman as the supreme concept of philosophy.'[1]

By drawing a sharp distinction between philosophy and religion, and implying the autonomy of each, Griswold tries to preserve intact the personal values embodied in Ishvara, the lower Brahman. This view receives some justification from Shankara. For example,

'we therefore must definitely conclude that Brahman is devoid of form. Those other passages ..... which refer to a Brahman qualified by form do not aim at setting forth the nature of Brahman, but rather at enjoining the worship of Brahman.'[2]

It would certainly be a mistake to under-rate the importance which Shankara attaches to saguna Brahman.

Nevertheless, although the personal Deity may appear absolutely real to the worshipper, he depends for his being as Lord

'Upon the limiting adjuncts of name and form, the products of nescience'[3]

It is due to the effect of Nescience that in the phenomenal world the supreme Brahman appears in the form of the Lord who is the ruler of the individual selves or jīvas.

'For him who has reached the state of truth and reality the whole apparent world does not exist.'[4]

Brahman cannot undergo change and so cannot be the ruler of changing selves. The same transcendence of Ishvara or saguna Brahman appears in Shankara's treatment of the ultimate end of life. The lower Brahman, as the Lord and ruler of the individual souls, metes out reward and punishment. This is allotted according to the actions of the souls.

1 Griswold, Op. Cit. p.76.

2 V.S. 3.ii.14.

3 V.S. 2.i.14.

4 Ibid.

'The fruits come from the Lord acting with a view to the deeds done by the souls.'[1]

The individual souls are created in forms corresponding to their past deeds. Souls who have lived well go on 'the path of the gods' to a kind of paradise, while those who have lived badly return to earth in another form. 'The path of the gods', however, has nothing to do with knowledge of Brahman, according to Shankara, and is quite irrelevant to those who have attained such knowledge.

'We do not see that going on the path of the gods has anything to do with perfect knowledge. For those who, risen to the intuition of the Self's unity, whose every wish is fulfilled, in whom the potentiality of all suffering is already destroyed here below, have nothing further to look for but the dissolution of the bode of activity and enjoyment of former deeds in the body; in their case, therefore, to proceed on the road of the gods would be purposeless.'[2]

Brahman, Sat, Cit, Moksha

Before closing this account of Brahman in Shankara's thought, there are several identifications which Shankara makes, which deserve comment.

The description of Brahman as sat, i.e. being or that which is we have already met. This identification is understandable since Brahman is the supremely real and that which is absolutely unchanging. In Hindu thought, sat, the real and unchanging is opposed to asat, not in the sense of the non-existent, but in the sense of the changing or even the chaotic.[3]

1 V.S. 3.ii.41 2 V.S. 3.iii.30.

3 c.f. Rg-Veda where being is said to have come from non-being. This seems to be the creation of order out of chaos in the manner of the Timaeus rather than Genesis.

Brahman is also identified with cit, i.e. consciousness. Cit is, in fact, the defining characteristic of Brahman and has links with the equation Ātman(the self) is Brahman; for the essential character of the Self is consciousness. The cognitive nature of Brahman is frequently likened to the luminosity of the sun.

'Brahman, whose nature is eternal cognition - as the sun's nature is eternal luminosity.'[1]

Shankara makes further use of the metaphor of light to explain the nature of consciousness. Just as we do not become aware of light except as it illuminates different objects, so the fact that we may not always be aware of being conscious does not mean that consciousness has ceased, but only that there are no objects of which to be conscious.

'The absence of actual intelligising is due to the absence of objects, not to the absence of intelligence; just as the light pervading space is not apparent owing to the absence of things to be illuminated, not to the absence of its own nature ..... eternal intelligence is the essential nature of the soul.'[2]

Shankara's explanation of the self-revealing nature of consciousness and his equation of the self of the individual with the supreme Brahman, the Self of the universe, will be discussed further in the next Chapter on the nature of the Ātman, as will the translation of cit.

Finally, moksha (release) is equated with being or knowing Brahman and the characteristics of moksha are described as the characteristics of Brahman. Moksha is said to be

'eternal without undergoing any changes, omnipresent as ether, free from all modifications, absolutely self-sufficient, not composed of parts, of self-luminous nature ..... It (moksha) is, therefore, the same as Brahman in the enquiry into which we are at present engaged.'[3]

1 V.S. 1.i.5. 2 V.S. 2.iii.18. 3 V.S. 1.i.4.

And later on : 'Release is nothing but being Brahman.'[1]

These are the salient points in Shankara's conception of Brahman. We turn now to Rāmānuja's account of Purushottama, or the Highest Lord.

Rāmānuja's Account Of God

Rāmānuja, like Shankara, holds a doctrine of Advaitism (non-dualism), i.e. the belief that the totality of experience is a unity; but in his case it is modified in that he allows for a diversity within the unity. Hence the name Vishishtādvaita (modified non-dualism) has been applied to his philosophy.

Western readers who study Rāmānuja become aware of a man who is deeply religious in a sense with which they are familiar, i.e. he worships a God who is supreme and personal in nature in that he elicits the loving devotion of His worshipper. He is also a God who by His grace enables his worshipper to achieve the final goal, moksha. Many elements in the Christian view of God and of life in God are present in Rāmānuja's writings. What is perhaps most striking in Rāmānuja's thought in its philosophical aspect, is his devotion to 'common-sense', by which I mean his determination to take the deliverences of common experience and common religious faith at their face value and not to relegate them to second place in the general scheme of things in order to satisfy the demands of theoretical explanation, however pressing these demands may be. Rāmānuja sees Shankara's monism as just such a threat to the ordinary meaning and significance of life. His criticisms of Shankara, which are both detailed and penetrating, concentrate on two main angles : he argues in the first place that experience is not as described by Shankara; for example, we never have any experience of 'pure consciousness', of 'undifferentiated unity', and that, therefore, Shankara's claims can have no experiential basis;

secondly, he argues that were experience as described by Shankara, then man's life would have no incentive and significance; for example, if 'I' am not there to experience moksha as Shankara claims is the case, then this goal of moksha can have no significance or interest for me. From this basis we see that what may loosely be termed 'personal values' seem likely to stand a better chance of survival with Rāmānuja than with Shankara.

We shall try to see in what follows, just how far the personal nature of Rāmānuja's God is comparable to the Christian God. We have noted that the predominant note in Hinduism is one of self-realisation, expressed in the traditional goal of moksha, liberation, freedom from the shackles of empirical existence, which results in the complete isolation and detachment of the 'witness-self'. It is difficult to see how this goal can be reconciled with the Christian standpoint which starts from the importance of the interpersonal and envisages a type of personal relationship based on love as the ultimate to be arrived at. The question which inevitably arises .... consider Rāmānuja's account of God is just how far he subscribes to each viewpoint. Does his view of God as personal result in an account of the significance of life which is based on personal relationships, or is the worshipper's relationship with his God to be viewed ultimately simply as a more effective means of obtaining self-realisation?

We have already noted some of the difficulties which arise in trying to describe a God with personal characteristics. Does personality not require an 'other' and does this not imply an intolerable limitation on God's nature? Can Rāmānuja present God's relationship with the world in such a way as to preserve both His personal characteristics and His transcendence and infinity?

Shankara asserts that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is 'one without a second', a bare self-identical unity : in contrast Rāmānuja presents us with a diversified unity, in which the parts, though they derive their ultimate reality and significance from their relationship to the world, may yet be regarded as having a certain independent existence of their own. The picture with which Rāmānuja presents us is of the world as an ensouled organism of which God is the soul. In other words, the analogy which Rāmānuja uses to describe the relationship of God to the world is that of the soul acting on the body. This is a good analogy in several aspects. One of the big problems which arises once we describe God as separate from the world is that of accounting for His relationship to the world and His action on the world. How can God, who transcends physical reality, react on physical reality? The only direct case of such action to which we have access is our own direction of our bodies and relation to them. In the soul-body relation we experience mind acting upon matter and to extend this analogy to the case of God's relationship to the world is far more comprehensible and significant than, for example, to refer to God as the First Cause, the Unmoved Mover, or to say that the world is simply a mistaken view of God. The latter notions are abstract and theoretical, while in the case of the soul-body relation, though we may not understand how it happens, we do observe <u>that</u> it happens and, therefore, we start from actual experience.

Another aspect in which the soul-body analogy is to be commended is that it presents a practical illustration of how something can be both dependent and independent. The body is absolutely dependent on the soul in that without the soul it is dead, unable to function at all. But granted that it requires the soul in order to function at all, the way

in which it moves and acts is not always under the complete control of the soul. Many parts of the body operate without any conscious effort on our part. Others generally require conscious effort, but do not always respond to it. Thus we may find ourselves unable to move our foot because of cramp.

The universe, according to Rāmānuja's conception of it as an ensouled body, consists of God, spiritual elements and non-spiritual elements (cit and acit).

'The Highest Self, which in itself is of the nature of unlimited knowledge and bliss, has for its body all sentient and non-sentient beings.'[1]

Van Buitenen in his edition of Rāmānuja's Vedartha Saṃgraha suggests that the better rendering of cit and acit is spiritual and non-spiritual rather than sentient and non-sentient. His reason is that sentiency is strictly speaking predicated of matter rather than of spirit and the term 'cit' is used to refer to the 'spiritual order of the universe, the sum-total of individual ātmans.'[2] In contrast, the term 'acit' refers to 'the non-spiritual order, the material or physical composition of the universe'[3] which is the corporeal counterpart of cit and subservient to it.

Rāmānuja's distinction between body and soul is in some respects similar to Aristotle's distinction of form and matter. Aristotle describes the soul as the form of the body, that which gives the body its distinctive character. The body, as the matter which is informed by the soul, can have no existence indpendent of the soul which is its

1 V.S. 1.iv.27

2 Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja's Vedartha Saṃgraha, p.183, fn.

3 Ibid.

form, and likewise the soul as form can only be understood as it is exhibited in the matter of the body. The two are strictly correlative and complementary, different aspects of one and the same concrete reality. All this applies equally to Rāmānuja. In Aristotle's case, the subject - attribute, form - matter distinction, is worked out in much greater detail. We get a range of phenomena, each of which can be understood as a complex of form and matter and the components of which can themselves be understood in this way. For example, the stone is the matter of the statue, but in relation to the particles of which the stone is composed, the stone is form. Thus there is no absolute distinction between what is form and what is matter. This would appear to be implicit in Rāmānuja's thought, in as much as the soul in relation to God is to be regarded as instrument and body. Where the two differ is that Aristotle allows for pure form at the top end of the scale viz. God, and pure matter at the lower end, though this latter may be purely logical requirement. In Rāmānuja's case, God is not pure Soul, existing independently of the world; He is the inner ruler and controller of the world which is his body, i.e. the means by which he functions and expresses himself.

Just as the body has no proper existence apart from the soul, so the spiritual and non-spiritual elements of the universe have no proper existence apart from God, their inner Ruler. The supreme Brahman rules the individual soul as the individual soul rules the body.[1] Rāmānuja's definition of body emphasises its utility. He says that

'Any substance which a sentient soul is capable of controlling and supporting for its own purposes, which stands to the soul in an entirely subordinate relation, is the body of that soul ..... In this sense, then, all sentient and non-sentient beings together constitute

1 Vedartha Saṁgraha, 2.26.

the body of the supreme Ruler, for they are completely controlled and supported by Him for His own ends, and are absolutely subservient to Him.'[1]

It is important not to confuse Rāmānuja's conception of the body with his conception of matter. The essence of body is not in its materiality, but in its being the instrument of the soul. Apart from serving the soul, the body has no proper existence.

Having emphasised the complete integration and interdependence of God and the world as exhibited in the soul-body analogy and, in particular. the body's dependence on the soul as its inner ruler, it is important to consider also the other side of the coin. As the body is the instrument of the soul and requires the soul's direction, so the soul needs the body in order to function and express itself. Any complete account of this metaphor must consider also the dependence of the soul on the body - what could be said about the soul apart from the body? How could it express itself apart from the body? As God is the Ruler of the world so the world must be regarded as the self-expression of God, as the means whereby He makes His character known, and if the world needs God in order to exist, so God must need the world. This implication is contained in Rāmānuja's thought and yet it is not developed to the extent which one might expect. In many ways this is not surprising as it raises enormous difficulties. If the world is to be regarded as an integral part of God, then so must all the imperfections and sufferings which are present in the world. How then can God be perfect? Rāmānuja is very concerned to rebut the charge that God can be affected by the imperfections of the world. Not only suffering is regarded as an imperfection, but also change of any kind. We have already had occasion to note this presupposition

1 Vedānta Sūtras, 2.i.9.

of both the Hindus and the Greeks that anything which is perfect cannot be thought of as changing in any way. In order to maintain the essential self-sufficiency and unchangingness of God, Rāmānuja invokes the doctrine of līlā : the world is simply the sport of God. This conception is very similar to that of Plato in the Timaeus. Just as the world results from a kind of overflow of God's creativity, according to Plato, so for Rāmānuja

'all beings ..... are mere playthings of Brahman ..... the creation and absorption of the world are only his sport.'[1]

God does change in as much as he passes from being in an unevolved state to being in an evolved state but in his essential nature he remains blissful in his unlimited knowledge. His evolution is not due to any necessity, but occurs simply because he is

'desirous of providing himself with an infinity of playthings of all kinds ..... from gods down to plants and stones.'[2]

Any imperfection, suffering or change which occurs in the world in no way affects its inner Ruler :

'all imperfections and suffering are limited to the sentient beings constituting part of its body, and all change is restricted to non-sentient things which constitute another part. The highest Self is <u>effected</u> in that sense only that it is the ruling principle ..... of maker and souls in their ..... evolved state; but just on account of being thus, viz. their inner Ruler and Self, it is in no way touched by their imperfections and changes. Consisting of unlimited knowledge and bliss he for ever abides in his unified nature, engaged in the sport of making this world go round.'[3]

When Rāmānuja denies that God can be in any way touched by the imperfections and changes of the world he seems to take back with one hand what he has given with the other. In proposing the soul-body

1 V.S. 1.iv.27. 2 Ibid. 3 V.S. 1.iv.27.

relationship as the model of the relationship of God and the world he offers an analogy which allows us to make sense of the relationship in terms of familiar experience. Although we may not understand the 'how' of the experience we cannot deny 'that' it occurs. The experience in question involves a two-way traffic. On the one hand, we are aware of ourselves as making decisions, controlling our movements, and so on : on the other hand, we are also affected by what happens to our bodies. We feel pain when we walk into a lamp-post, we are disappointed when prevented from achieving our goals and in general, are aware of the way in which our bodies both present us with possibilities of experience and also set limits to our experience. If the soul-body analogy is to be taken seriously and to be regarded as helpful, it is not pressing it too far to ask that it take into account such features of our experience. Certainly the reciprocity which this demands raises great difficulties when applied to the case of God and the world, yet unless this reciprocity be granted and the demands which it makes faced up to it hardly seems worthwhile to employ the soul-body analogy at all.

In employing the soul-body analogy, yet denying that God can be affected by the changes in the world, Rāmānuja is once again failing to hold consistently to his original insight and reverting to the view of the soul-body relationship held by Shankara. For Shankara a man is mistaken in identifying himself with his body or even with his mind or his thoughts. His true self is not to be found in the changing, outward manifestations of the personality, but in the isolated, blissful witness-self who remains imperturbable and calm in the midst of every change. So the enlightened man strives to gain greater and greater control over the functions of his body and mind and eventually even his environment, because he realises that they are all separate from, and

subservient to, his real self. A man in an unenlightened condition may identify himself with his environment, desires and ambitions, but when he comes to see the true nature of things he realises that these form no part of his true self.

Whatever the merits of Shankara's account of the soul-body relation, which will be discussed in the next Chapter, it is clear that it departs from what can reasonably be regarded as the common-sense understanding of experience.

The question of the reciprocal interdependence of the world and God has an important bearing on the question of the relationship between the worshipper and God. In Chapter One I argued that a personal relationship did not necessarily presuppose equality as persons between the participants and that in many cases it was up to one partner to supply all or nearly all of the 'personal' element in the relationship. Further I argued that some of the characteristics ascribed to God which we consider to contribute to his 'personal' character, are not qualities to be found in any human person. One essential feature of a personal relationship, however, is that there shall be a 'response' of some kind by one party to the other's approaches. Unless the doctor elicits a response from his patient, the patient cannot be cured and elicitation of this response does not leave the doctor cold and indifferent, but rather confirms him in his attitude of personal concern for the patient. Likewise the baby's response has an effect on the mother which again is reflected back on the baby. If the relationship between man and God is to be described in personal terms then it must be supposed that the response of man to God itself produces some effect on God. For example, if God is described as a Ruler, then just as a ruler is pleased when his subjects obey him, so God must be supposed to be gratified when man

obeys Him. In Christianity while the predominant trend in religious practice presumes a degree of reciprocal interaction between God and man, yet philosophers have been slow to realise this and have persisted in describing God in abstract, Aristotelian terms such as the First Cause and Unmoved Mover, neither of which terms could refer to a possible object of worship or reverence.

Although prima facie Rāmānuja's use of the soul-body analogy gives the possibility of a degree of reciprocal interaction between God and the world which allows for the development of a personal relationship between man and God, and, therefore, permits the adoption of a set of values centered on the experience of relationship, yet on closer inspection we find that Rāmānuja's recognition of the importance of relationship in the religious consciousness is not given an adequate critical foundation. The dependence of the body on the soul is developed in a wholly one-sided manner and we have to recognise that although the world is God's body, yet it is in the last analysis simply 'an instrument of sport'.[1]

The importance for Rāmānuja of allowing for God's response to the worshipper is brought out in the question of the compassion of God. Rāmānuja's school is particularly noted for its emphasis on the grace of God which enables the worshipper to attain salvation. This is an aspect of Rāmānuja's theism which is of great interest from the Christian point of view. The followers of Rāmānuja were later to divide into the 'cat' and the 'monkey' school, differing in their accounts of the operation of the grace of God. As the cat carries its kittens in its mouth and so requires no co-operation from them at all, whereas the monkey must hold on to its mother, so the 'monkey' school differed from the 'cat' school in holding that some co-operation

1 V.S. 1.iv.27.

with the grace of God was necessary from the believer in order that grace could be efficacious. To assert the reality of the compassionate grace of God, however, is meaningless unless God is understood as being moved by the suffering of the world and acting in response to the world's need. It is difficult to see how God can consistently be regarded as compassionate yet 'in no way touched by ..... imperfections and changes.'[1]

The difficulty here is twofold. All change is regarded as imperfection and to admit that God is affected by change in the world, even though the world may be regarded as his body, is apparently to admit imperfection in God.

The first reply to this is to contradict the assertion that change is synonymous with imperfection. Change in itself is neutral : it is part and parcel of experience. Rāmānuja was bold enough to assert that there can be no perception of anything completely undifferentiated. He might also have added that there is no perception of anything changeless. Some things in our experience change less than others, but it is a matter of degree depending on the kind of thing in question. Further, some changes may be for the better and there are some forms of perfection which would be unattainable apart from change. A piece of music is a pattern of changes and there are some pieces of music which give us an experience of perfection which it may seem to some is unlikely to be surpassed.

Having said this, however, it must be admitted that change in relation to God is a special case. God cannot be supposed to be other than unchangeably great and good, to mention only two of his attributes. But to say that God is unchangeably good is not to preclude the possibility of his unchanging goodness being manifested in a number of

1 Ibid.

changing ways. Indeed, it is difficult to know how God could be supposed to be good in any meaningful sense if there were no possibility of seeing the evidence of his goodness exhibited in a variety of changing situations.

The second difficulty is not so easily answered. Any form of theism which identifies the creator of the world and the source of moral goodness must inevitably be faced with the problem of accounting for imperfection and evil in the world. It is doubtful whether any answer is possible here. On the positive side one may say that a situation which allows for a certain degree of imperfection may ultimately produce something of greater value that a situation in which the possibility of imperfection is ruled out from the start. In Rāmānuja's case, his assertion that God in his essential nature remains blissful in his unlimited knowledge does not remove the problem. The imperfections remain as aspects of God's body and there is no explanation of this. Indeed the situation is somewhat worse for Ramānuja than it is for Shankara, for whereas Shankara can explain imperfection as ultimately an illusion (though who or what is responsible for the illusion?), Rāmānuja's common-sense standpoint means that he must acknowledge its reality. In the light of these considerations it is clear that Rāmānuja would have little to lose and a great deal to gain by interpreting the soul-body analogy in such a way as to allow for reciprocal interaction between God and the individual soul.

The Unity Of Experience

We shall now consider whether Rāmānuja's explanation of the world as a whole can be considered any more satisfactory than that of Shankara.

Rāmānuja, like G.E. Moore, is the apostle of common-sense. Constantly

in rebutting Shankara's arguments he refers us to experience and to the everyday meaning of words and phrases. In his refutation of Shankara's claim that reality is pure, undifferentiated consciousness he refers us to our ordinary means of knowing anything. He examines the different accepted means of knowledge and asserts categorically that

'all means of right knowledge have for their object things affected with difference.'[1]

For example, none of the senses apprehend pure being, the eye apprehends colour and coloured objects. Further, the Advaitins argued that plurality must be unreal, and hence difference, on the grounds that none of the differences presented in cognition persist : in other words, the familiar premiss that only the unchanging can be ultimately real, and since everything we experience changes in some way, nothing can be ultimately real. Rāmānuja answers this by distinguishing between 'persistence and non-persistence' and the relation between 'what sublates and what is sublated'. When one cognition is sublated by another, then the former is shown to be false or illusory, as when the cognition of silver on the beach is sublated by the cognition of the shell. In this case we have a cognition which does not persist and which is sublated. In contrast, Rāmānuja gives the example of different perceptions of things like jars which are separated in space and time from each other. These perceptions, although they do not persist, are not contradictory of each other and, therefore, do not sublate each other and indicate their unreality. In other words, there are two different kinds of change or non-persistence and only one of these is a reason for supposing the changed perceptions to be unreal.

It must be admitted in Rāmānuja's favour that the world of empirical experience does not yield pure, undifferentiated unities and that the

1 V.S. 1.i.1.

the argument that change and non-persistence imply unreality is fallacious. The unities which we do find are unities in multiplicity, amongst them organic unities. An organic unity, such as a plant or animal, contains parts, but these parts, although they have a real existence in that they can be distinguished from each other, have no independent existence. The flower needs the roots before it can flourish and when cut from the root it eventually withers, though the flower is undoubtedly something different from the roots. The higher the type of life we study, the more complex does its organic unity become, and the most complex type of organic unity in the biological field is undoubtedly exhibited in man in the soul-body relation. If we take biological life as the most significant type of existence in the universe then Rāmānuja's account is prima facie more in accord with the world as we actually find it than is Shankara's. Organic unities in the biological sense, however, are not the only kinds of unity to be found in the universe. A work of art, for example, may also be regarded as a complex kind of organic unity. It has been suggested that the criteria for the beauty and, therefore, the value of a work of art may be found in its degree of complexity taken together with the extent to which that complexity is unified into an organic whole.[1] If we start from this point, then it may be just as plausible to regard the universe as a whole as a gigantic work of art which exhibits the highest possible degree of organic unity, each element being necessary for the completion of the whole. This type of picture is, in fact, fairly familiar. The Leibnizian concept of the best of all possible worlds suggests an organic whole of an aesthetic nature. This type of total account has the advantage (or

1 Harold Osbourne, Theory of Beauty.

disadvantage, according to one's convictions) of accounting for the presence of evil in the world by making it the counterpart of good.

Apart from organic unities in the biological and aesthetic senses, there are other unities : for example, natural phenomena like mountain ranges, oceans and ice-caps are unities, but not organic unities; what of different kinds of social groupings and societies? these again may be unities, but not of an organic nature; the artefacts which man creates are by and large not organic unities; the course of a man's life may be regarded as a unity, but seldom as an organic unity. These are merely intended as suggestions to exhibit the change of unified diversity which we find in experience. We could also mention the disunity and strife which is also part and parcel of experience and this would complicate the picture still further.

The general point to be made is that however tempting and comprehensible it may be to try to explain the world as a whole on the analogy of what we find in our experience, are we entitled to generalise in this way? The world as we find it is not self-explanatory and there is no reason to suppose that an explanation of the world as a whole will accord with what at first sight may seem fairly obvious in our experience. I have argued that Rāmānuja's analogy of the soul-body relation to explain the world as a whole has much to commend it. On the other hand, on closer inspection we see that biological organic unities are not the only type of unities in the universe as we know it, and there may be a case for considering the merits of some other kind of unity. Another feature of an account such as Rāmānuja's, which bases the explanation of the world as a whole on the analogy of what is taken to be the most significant feature within the world, is that it speaks to us in terms that we understand. The explanation is comprehensible : we can grasp the gist

of what is being said. We have seen that Rāmānuja is the great exponent of common-sense and his arguments have the solid ring which comes from their being based on incontrovertible experience. But, and this is a major reservation, the very fact that we are talking about the world as a whole means that we cannot refer to it in the way that we can refer to individual objects within the world. It is doubtful even if it makes sense to talk about knowing the ultimately real in the way that we know the empirically real. Hence Rāmānuja may be naive in implying that Brahman can be known and Shankara may hold the philosophically tenable position in claiming that Brahman is ultimately 'beyond speech and mind.'

We shall see in the next Chapter that there are great difficulties involved in Shankara's claim that we 'know' Brahman in some sense, as on examination, it turns out that this sense of the verb 'to know' can have no counterpart in our ordinary use of the word. Hence what meaning can be given to Shankara's assertions? It must be admitted, however, that in our ordinary use of the term what we can 'know' is subject to definite limitations and conditions. There is no reason to suppose that the world as a whole should be subject to the conditions imposed on the objects contained within it, and indeed the reverse position would seem more probable, i.e. that the world as a whole is <u>not</u> subject to the limitations of its parts and, therefore, cannot be known in the same way as can the parts. If this be the case then it is an oversimplification to use the verb 'know' in its ordinary sense when discussing the world as a whole. We appear, in fact, to be in a cleft stick : to talk about knowledge in the ordinary sense is to go beyond what we are entitled to, and to talk about knowledge in a new esoteric sense is to risk talking nonsense and saying nothing.

One of Shankara's reasons for holding that Brahman alone is real is that he takes it to be the only rational possibility. The only way that it is possible for us to think the world as a whole is as a unity (this is, indeed, a tautology) and for Shankara, the only rationally acceptable kind of unity was permanent, unchanging, undifferentiated. Because of this requirement of thought, it logically followed that the empirical world of difference must be unreal. We have already noted that the Hindus like the Greeks, had a predilection for the necessary and unchanging. But is this any more than a metaphysical preference? Is there any sound reason for preferring a non-differentiated unity to a differentiated unity?

While it seems to be a presupposition of thought that there should be an ultimate unity, there is nothing in thought itself to indicate whether this unity is differentiated or undifferentiated. On the showing of the evidence available, however, it seems more probable that there should be a very complex kind of unity.

If it were the case that the world as a whole were a very complex kind of unity then there is no reason to suppose that it would be 'knowable' in its totality in the same way that the complex unities of ordinary experience are known. These latter unities are known from within the framework of experience, but the world in its totality could only be grasped from a viewpoint 'outside' experience, if it were to be known in the ordinary sense and this is, of course, impossible. Nevertheless, the fact that we would be dealing with a unity which contained complexity and hence differentiation would enable something significant to be said about it in the ordinary sense of the terms. This, obviously, has great advantages as it would enable competing accounts to present rational arguments to each other up to a certain point.

Assuming that the world as a whole were a very complex unity, is there anything to indicate what sort of unity this might be, allowing for the assumption that we could never grasp it in its totality? The highest and most complex kinds of unity with which we are acquainted are personal unities. An individual person is a unity of feeling, thought and action. It does not follow from this, of course, that any unity which is very complex is likely, or probably, some kind of personal unity. Yet it does provide us with a starting point which makes it worthwhile asking whether our experiential personal unity can be applied to the world as a whole : this brings us back to Rāmānuja. There is nothing illogical in supposing that the unity of the universe as a whole can be at least nothing less complex than some kind of personal unity.

Following on from this, we might also consider the nature of the unity which is present in a community of persons. As the only kind of life with which we are acquainted is dependent on the joint co-operation of persons, and as each person has his own personal unity which forms part of the communal unity, this subsumes personal unity under communal unity. Communal unity in turn subsumes most, if not all, other unities and aspects of life under it : for example, the creation of works of art requires a community of persons for whom they have significance; and the life of the community requires that both natural phenomena and human artefacts be brought within its orbit and subordinated to its needs and aspirations to become part of its unity.

The Lower And The Higher Brahman

Rāmānuja's position is nearer the Christian position than is that of Shankara, in that both Rāmānuja and Christian thinkers insist that

ultimately God or Brahman is personal in character. It might be argued, however, that this is only superficially the case. Any account of God which confines itself to discussing Him in purely personal terms is bound to ignore an important feature without which God would not be God viz. his transcendence or complete otherness from the world. It will not do to discuss God purely in terms of his relationship to and activity in the world for this is necessarily to limit Him. In so far as we consider God as the object of our worship we must consider him as a personal being, but when we come to give a philosophical account of his absolute transcendence, then we realise that all terms are misleading, God is simply 'One without a second'. If this be the case, then Shankara's distinction between the lower and the higher Brahman may offer more hope of satisfying both theologians and philosophers. Further, Shankara's distinction between the lower and higher Brahman is not without its parallel in the thought of Christian theologians. Rudolph Otto finds many similarities between the mysticism of Shankara and that of Eckhart, the mediaeval Christian mystic and theologian.[1]

Eckhart distinguishes between God and the Godhead. God is the personal God of the Church, but the Godhead, Eckhart describes in terms which might well be those of Shankara discussing the higher Brahman; for example,

'He is the purely One without the admission even in thought of anything quantitative or differentiated, above everything which suffers even in thought or name the faintest shadow of difference, in whom all delimitation and qualification is lost.'[2] And again

'God is neither this or that like these manifold things. God is one.'[3]

1 Rudolph Otto, Mysticism East And West, New York, Macmillan, 1932.

2 Op. Cit. p.11.

3 Ibid.

The argument is that we can distinguish between the personal God of the worshipper and the theologian and the account or analysis of this given by the philosopher. The fact that the philosopher may be unable to justify the worshipper's account as it stands is no reason for abandonning the worshipper's account, which is perfectly valid in the context of worship and devotional life. A similar argument might be advanced by someone who wished to agree with G.E. Moore that his two hands were prime examples of material objects, yet disagreed that a satisfactory philosophical account of the concept of a material object could be given.

One decisive objection to this interpretation of Shankara and Eckhart is that it is not the way that these thinkers viewed the distinction. The higher Brahman and the Godhead are no mere philosophical abstractions, but the apprehensions of a living religious consciousness in each case. They are not simply matters of thought, but of experience. The apprehension of the Godhead or the higher Brahman is not a matter of philosophical thinking, but of spiritual intuition. For example, Eckhart says

'The seer has to pass beyond "God" into the silent void of the Godhead itself. That is the highest vision, and whoever still has "a God" has not yet reached the highest and the last. He stands only on the verge of eternity, but not yet within it.'[1]

Shankara points out that once the intuition of the supreme Brahman is achieved, all empirical knowledge, though genuine on the lower level, is seen to be māyā, and the means of knowledge, such as perception or inference are no longer valid. The realisation of the meaning of such key texts as 'Tat twam asi', That thou art, is dependent on insight

1 Rudolph Otto, Op. Cit., Quoted pp.7-8.

and not on reasoning or analysis. This spiritual insight is reflected in the life of the person concerned. Realising that the empirical world is māyā he is no longer swayed either by external events or by his own desires and passions.

For both Shankara and Eckhart, the god of religion and the god of philosophy completely coincided. What their religious consciousness apprehended in experience was found to be capable of satisfactory analysis in philosophical terms by their reason. For Shankara, at any rate, it seems clear that there can be no room for the workings of God in the life of a man who has realised his identity with the supreme Brahman. Such a man will be prepared to accept that worship is a perfectly genuine activity for other people so long as they remain on the empirical level of understanding, but will claim that it is senseless for one who has achieved the highest knowledge.

Apart from its being alien to Shankara's thought, the distinction between a god of religion and a god of philosophy is difficult to sustain. It is true that religion and philosophy have different interests in the sense that they are concerned with different kinds of questions. For example, Gilson contrasts 'a religious explanation of the world by means of certain persons' with 'a philosophical explanation of the world by means of one or several natural things' and says that they represent 'two distinct types of problems, demonstrations and solutions.'[1] So long as we have a situation of polytheism or henotheism as did the early Greeks and Indians then it is possible to keep the two apart. Gilson argues that in religion until the time of Aristotle, the god of philosophy and the god of religion were never identified with each other in Greek thought, although

1 E. Gilson, God And Philosophy,

admittedly this would have been a logical conclusion for any thinker to have drawn. A similar situation seems to have obtained in India. Explanations of the world in terms of living beings existed side by side with explanations of the world in terms of natural principles, but the two are distinct until the time of the Upanishads. For example, in one of the verses of the Rg-Veda the poet says that perhaps God knows how the world was created and perhaps he does not.[1] In the Upanishads we get attempts to present a unified account of the relation of the different appearances in the world to the ultimate reality and these take the form of rival theistic and monistic accounts. It became one of the tasks of the commentators to show that either the theistic account was capable of incorporating the monistic or vice versa. In contrast, the Jews started with the advantage of having only one God and consequently, as Gilson remarks, a follower of the Jewish God would know at once that

'whatever the nature of reality itself may be said to be, its religious principle must of necessity coincide with its philosophical principle. Each of them being one, they are bound to be the same and to provide men with one and the same explanation of the world.'[2]

A philosophical explanation of the world and the religious explanation of the world cannot in the end be kept apart. Sooner or later the question of the relationship between the two must arise and if there be an ultimate point of reference in each explanation, then either they must be allowed to be one and the same, or one must be shown to be subordinate to the other.

If we agree that the higher Brahman is just as much an object of religion as of philosophy, the question still remains regarding the

1 Rg-Veda, 10. 129. 7. 2 Gilson, Op. Cit. p.38.

similarity between Shankara's thought and an account such as that of Eckhart. This is a complicated question.

The Christian position is that God has revealed His nature to us in the creation of the world and in His activity in history. Whatever more He may be, what He has revealed of Himself in these ways cannot be negated. In other words, if we can draw a distinction between the Godhead and God, between the transcendent other and the activity of a supreme Being in this world, then there must be a continuity between the two such that the former does not negate the latter. Otto's comparison between Shankara and Eckhart would suggest that there is such a continuity in Eckhart's thought, which is lacking in Shankara's account of Brahman. This continuity centres around two main points.

In the first place

'Both masters seek and behold unity and the Eternal One in contrast to multiplicity, but with this difference : the relationship of the One to the many is for Shankara one of strict exclusion, but for Eckhart one of the most live polarity.'[1]

Eckhart's God is a living God and the metaphors used to describe him imply movement and activity : the 'wheel rolling out of itself' or 'a stream flowing into itself'. This means that God is not sufficient unto himself, but it is in his nature to create the world. In contrast, Otto claims, Shankara's Brahman or Sat is an abstraction or state of static repose.[2] The creation of the world is not necessary to his nature, but due to the mistake of Avidyā.

1 Otto, Op. Cit., pp.123-4.

2 It must be noted that this would not be accepted by other writers, for example, Betty Heimann makes quite the opposite contrast : it is the Christian God which is a static Absolute while the fundamental concepts of the East presuppose a dynamic Eternal. Facets of Indian Thought, Allen & Unwin, London, 1964. Shankara is not referred to specifically here.

Secondly, Eckhart's mysticism leads to a positive attitude towards the world and to the moral life and to a positive evaluation of life in the world; whereas that of Shankara is life denying and morality - denying. As the devotional life ceases to be meaningful to the man who knows Brahman, so does the moral life.

Otto's own view is not entirely clear. Although he draws these contrasts in content and thus appears to deny that there is a continuity between the lower and the higher Brahman, yet earlier in the book[1] he is at pains to refute this suggestion and says that for Shankara

'none of the dignity of the world - creating and world - governing God must be lost to the eternal Brahman. The latter is to be very greatly exalted, but in such a way, that all value that pertains to the lower shall be taken up into the higher.'[2]

This remark is very difficult to reconcile with his later comments.

If Otto is right in thinking that the higher Brahman is inclusive of the lower, then Shankara's position may well turn out to be the more satisfactory compared with that of Rāmānuja, both theologically and philosophically. But if there is a negation of personal values, then we seem to be losing, not simply an account of what is involved in religion, but the whole religious life itself, as well as the rest of our empirical existence.

The Relation Between Nirguna and Saguna Brahman

How is Shankara to be interpreted in his account of the relation between nirguna and saguna Brahman? There are elements in Shankara's thought which point in both directions. He declares that the comprehension of Brahman brings to an end all empirical activities yet he also asserts that the Self 'reveals itself in a graduated series of beings, and so

1 Ibid. Transition, Sect. 10-16. 2 Ibid. p.157-8.

appears in forms of various dignity and power.'[1] The latter text suggests a continuity between the lower and higher Brahman which is denied by the former yet it was in the light of the former text that Shankara was interpreted by his immediate successors. It is this interpretation which has given rise to the traditional picture of the world-denying, life-negating ascetic which features so largely in Hindu thought. On the other hand the idea of the self-revelation of Brahman in an increasingly fuller and more self-conscious manner has been developed in recent Hindu thought by the philosopher and mystic Aurobindo and others.

One of the key factors in the relation of the lower to the higher Brahman lies in the interpretation of the concept 'māyā'. We have already noted the duality of meaning present in it by the time of Shankara : it signified both the self-expression and creativity of Brahman in the world yet also it served to conceal the true nature of Brahman. While Aurobindo recognises the element of concealment present in māyā he emphasises primarily its creative power :

'out of the supreme being in which all is all without barrier of separative consciousness emerges the phenomenal being in which all is in each and each is in all .....'[2]

It may be worthwhile to elaborate Aurobindo's position in a little more detail at this point as it serves as a good example of the way in which the non-dualism of Shankara may be developed without its traditional

1 V.S. 1.i.11.

2 Arya, pp.108-9, quoted in A Source Book in Indian Philosophy, ed. S. Radhakrishnan and C.A. Moore, Princeton University Press, 1957, p.596.

corollary of the world being an illusion, and in a way which brings non-dualism close to things which have been and are being said by Western philosophers and theologians. A total evaluation of Aurobindo's thought (and that, also, of other contemporary Hindus), would have to involve a consideration of his indebtedness to Western thought and particularly to Idealist philosophy, as well as the influence of traditional Hindu thought. This is without the scope of the present work so that the following comments can only be regarded as an example of a possible interpretation of māyā, which emphasises its creative aspect.

Aurobindo's Interpretation Of Māyā

Aurobindo insists on accepting both Unity and Multiplicity. Neither excludes the other. Apparent opposites are reconciled in the light of Ultimate Reality. The details of this belief are worked out in a doctrine of the involution of Spirit into Matter and the subsequent Evolution of Spirit through various grades of matter, mind, super-mind, which is reminiscent of Hegel's doctrine of the progressive self-manifestation of the Absolute. Aurobindo emphatically rejects all rigid dichotomies and consequently rejects the illusionism of Shankara.

'Shankara's wordless, inactive Self and his Māyā of many names and forms are equally disparate and irreconcilable entities; their rigid antagonism can terminate only by the dissolution of the multitudinous illusion into the sole Truth of an eternal Silence.'[1]

In contrast, the truth of Māyā is that it is

'God's play of the infinities of existence, the splendours of knowledge, the glories of force mastered and the ecstasies of love illimitable .....'[2]

1 Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Calcutta, 1939, p.10.

2 Ibid. p.175.

Since all opposites are reconcilable, the experience of the One and the Many are complementary to each other. They represent different aspects of Brahman, the inactive and the active, positive and negative and 'each is necessary to the other.'[1]

We have noted the difficulties involved in relating Shankara's nirguna and saguna Brahman. Whereas for Shankara nirguna brahman supercedes saguna brahman, for Aurobindo the two are complementary. But, attractive as it is, does Aurobindo's alternative convince any more than that of Shankara? In spite of the fine rhetoric of the language, there is little positive argument to convince us that there is a reconciliation of opposites and that this reconciliation occurs in the manner supposed by Aurobindo. The doubt is increased when he ends his chapter on Reality Omnipresent with the admission that the perception of the resolution of the dualities in the universe must 'constantly support itself on an act of faith .....'[2]

This criticism notwithstanding, there is much of interest in Aurobindo's position, particularly as compared with the 'process theology' of contemporary Christian thought. In the writings of Charles Hartshorne for example, the implications of God's relativity are developed very fully. One of the ways in which Hartshorne has done this is by examining the concept of the unsurpassibility of God.[3] Hartshorne points out that the unsurpassibility of God by any other does not preclude the possibility that He should be constantly surpassing Himself. Once this is admitted we are faced with the idea that God has a past and a future. The notion of a relative aspect to Deity which manifests itself temporally is common to both Aurobindo and Hartshorne.

1 Ibid. p.40. 2 Ibid. p.50.

3 See e.g. The Divine Relativity, Yale University Press, 1948. Abstract and Concrete Approaches to Deity, Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. 20, No. 3, March 1965.

Both are also in agreement that this in no way impairs the absoluteness of God or the Self. For Hartshorne the absoluteness of God must include absolute relativity : God is unsurpassable in His relativity and so can relate Himself as perfectly as is possible to each of his creatures.

Conclusions

What emerges from this discussion is the possibility that there may not be such a wide gulf between Shankara's account of Brahman and the Christian account of God as at first appeared. One of the reasons for a distinction between the lower and higher Brahman is the need to recognise divine transcendence as well as divine activity in the world. Christian thought also faces these questions. If māyā is interpreted, as it is by Aurobindo, as the self-manifestation and self-expression of God rather than the veil which hides reality from us, then it allows for the possibility of a positive basis on which to develop personal values which is comparable to the picture presented by Christian thought.

Nevertheless, although divine transcendence is maintained in Shankara's account of nirguna (qualityless) Brahman, it is maintained at the cost of making the personal element in the Divine dubious. Māyā may be interpreted as the self-expression of God, but in order to maintain the continuity of the higher and lower Brahman it is necessary to give an account of the higher (nirguna) Brahman which in no way contradicts the values implicit in the concept of saguna Brahman. In the following pages I shall argue that while Shankara's nirguna Brahman may well be described as an 'individual subsistence of a rational nature', the definition of 'person' given by the Western philosopher Boethius, yet this in no way guarantees the personal nature of nirguna Brahman and in fact glosses over important distinctions between Shankara's account of nirguna Brahman and Rāmānuja's account of God. The reason for this

stems from a deficiency in the definition of a person as a 'self-subsistent being of a rational nature' and it is to this that we now turn.

Difficulties in Defining 'Person' as 'Self-Subsistent, Rational Entity'

Boethius' definition of a person as 'an individual subsistence of a rational nature' is unsatisfactory in several respects when extrapolated as a description of God.

It is insufficiently precise in its application. As we shall see, it is a reasonable description of Shankara's nirguna Brahman. If we conclude from this, however, that both Shankara's nirguna Brahman and Rāmānuja's Purushottama are personal in nature, important distinctions are blurred : between a god who has feelings of love towards his worshippers and who aids them with his divine grace, and an absolute of whom such talk makes no sense. In other words, the distinction between personal and impersonal is blurred rather than clarified.

One reason for this is an ambiguity in the meaning of the term 'rational'. In one sense, 'rational' implies a being who is rational in the sense that he acts rationally, i.e. he acts and thinks in ways which are appropriate to the situation in which he finds himself. This accords with our ordinary understanding of the terms 'personal' and 'rational'. In this sense we can agree that a defining character of being a person is that of having a rational nature. In the history of philosophy, on the other hand, 'rational' has not generally had this connotation : it has been associated with the distinction between truths of reason and truths of fact, and in this sense has suggested something which is logically necessary. In this meaning of rational, mathematics and logic are prime exhibitors of rationality. Following this line of thought, a first principle may well be rational without being a person. It

could be something which could not be thought not to be and from which the world follows as a necessary consequence, but which could in no sense be described as acting or willing to produce the world. It may be that Christians have frequently had this sense of rational in mind when discussing rationality in connection with God. This seems to be implicit in A.O. Lovejoy's account when he traces the history of the Greek principles of self-sufficiency and plenitude in Christian thought.[1] Nevertheless, it is not this concept which is central in the Hebrew-Christian revelation. The existence of the world does not follow as a necessary consequence from the nature of God, but God creates the world as an act of will. In allowing the meaning of rational as 'logically necessary' to predominate in their thought, Christian theologians have let the God of Greek philosophy usurp the place of the God of Christianity. There is a third somewhat different sense of rational in which it refers to what pertains to the mind. In this sense, the rational, as mind, is opposed to the material, as for example, when Descartes distinguished between intelligent mind and inert matter and Berkeley argued that matter could never be the cause of an idea.

The implications of this sense of rational are interesting, in that it is a kind of half-way house between a personal and impersonal meaning of the term, which apparently does not imply any dubious assertions about the supposed owner of the mind. Inert, blind matter is contrasted with active conscious mind. Matter is blind because it cannot be said to be aware of its movements and cannot, therefore, be said to initiate any of them deliberately or with forethought. Mind is conscious and active because it <u>is</u> aware of what it is doing and can, therefore, be said to do things with a purpose. But the only kinds of beings which we know to be aware of what they are doing and

1 A.O. Lovejoy, <u>The Great Chain of Being</u>, Harvard Univ. Press, 1936.

to act with a purpose are personal agents. One might imagine that to describe something as the work of mind would imply that it was the outcome of personal agency. This conclusion is not drawn, however. Part of the reason for this may be that those who have argued in this way have wished to say that the world as a whole has a structure and design which is explicable in terms of nothing less than mind, and yet they have, for various reasons, hesitated to draw the explicit conclusion that there was a personal agency behind the world. Thus we get the odd conception of purposiveness and agency without an agent or a purpose, which only fails to strike us as odd because it has become so familiar.

But why should we be afraid of agency as a metaphysical notion? Why should it seem less respectable to account for the world in terms of an agent than in terms of a principle? It is understandable that the Greeks should have fought shy of talking about agency in connection with their first principle. In Greek thought[1] philosophy and religion followed different paths and were concerned with different questions. Religion was concerned with questions of agency regarding the meaning and purpose of life. These were referred to the gods, in the plural. Philosophy was concerned with an explanation of things in terms of general principles, without regard to the question of why there was anything at all. It would be natural to connect up these questions and to account for <u>what</u> there is by the same principle as one accounts for <u>why</u> it is there, but this was difficult for the Greeks because they had a plurality of gods. It is plausible to suppose that because they were unable to produce a single unified answer to the question of 'why', they had, of necessity, to subordinate this question to that of

1 See E. Gilson, <u>God And Philosophy</u>.

'what', and thus subordinated agency to principle.

It is unnecessary, however, for Christian philosophy to follow them in this. For the Christian believer, the god of philosophy and the god of religion are one and the same. This means that both questions of philosophy and religion can be referred ultimately to the same source and we are free to consider on its own merits the question of whether agency should be subordinated to principle, action to being. Christian revelation shows God to be a god of action, one who creates the world out of nothing and who has placed man in it with a definite purpose in view. From this, it follows that until insuperable difficulties have been clearly shown to arise, the correct metaphysical starting point for Christian philosophy is agency.

The question of a starting point for metaphysics will be discussed further in the next Chapter in relation to the self. I shall argue, along the lines of John MacMurray, that only by regarding the self from the standpoint of an agent rather than as a knowing subject can an adequate account of experience be given.

Shankara's Nirguna Brahman As A Self-Subsistent, Rational, Individual

It will be seen from these remarks that I do not think that 'an individual subsistence of a rational nature' is an adequate definition of 'person'. The main reason for my doubts is that it seems to leave completely open the question of whether such a subsistence acts or is in any way an agent. It is impossible to make sense of the concept of person without bringing in the notion of agency.

Having said this, let us see how Shankara's account of Brahman agrees with Boethius' definition.

Brahman is undoubtedly a subsistence. One of Shankara's most important

ways of referring to Brahman is as 'sat' (being), 'The Self (another synonym for Brahman) is nothing but that which is (the Sat).'[1] Brahman is not simply a subsistence amongst other subsistences, but is subsistence or being itself.

Is Brahman an individual? To say that something is an individual is to imply that it can be distinguished from other individuals, and that, therefore, it possesses a unique description. Shankara would certainly say that there could not be another Brahman and that Brahman is different from everything else to which one can refer, but this is not quite the same as giving a description which applies uniquely to Brahman and excludes all other individuals. However, we have discussed previously the sense in which Shankara thinks it possible to refer to Brahman. Brahman may be regarded as an individual, but not in precisely the same sense as any particular object in the world is an individual.

In what sense can Brahman be said to have a rational nature? Here we are faced with a problem similar to that to which I have referred in connection with Greek philosophy and religion. The Hindus, too, recognised a plurality of gods. In the course of time, different gods came to assume the supremacy, but even to this day, different gods are worshipped as supreme by different sects, and Hindus find no difficulty in accepting what would be, for the Christian, an intolerably anomolous situation : that different objects of worship are all the same god under different names and guises.

Again we have the situation of philosophy giving expression to the questions asked by religion. Certain questions demand an answer in terms of agency and others in terms of first principles; but

1 Vedānta Sūtra, 1.i.8.

philosophy and religion must ultimately have a single reference. Since religion has never succeeded in unifying itself in the sense of acknowledging one supreme god who brooks no rivals, agency must be subordinated to principle : philosophy must win the day. The starting point of Shankara's philosophy is being. But here we are led to the same oddity that we have noticed in the Western conception of mind. A truly explanatory first principle must explain why the world is, and not simply what it is, and so we get the notion of consciousness playing the same part as mind. It is self-aware and purposive, but cannot be termed an agent.

Shankara's nirguna Brahman may, therefore, be described as rational in the sense that it is self-aware and purposive. Shankara devotes a considerable portion of the Vedanta Sutras to arguing against the rival Sāṁkhya school, very powerful in his day, who claimed that the first principle of the world was inert, unconscious matter (prakṛti). One of his arguments is that the animate cannot be produced from the inanimate, whereas we find from experience that the reverse does happen. He describes Brahman's nature as being 'eternal cognition'.[1] He is both material and operative cause of the world.[2] But on the other hand, he is definitely not an agent.

Although the definition 'individual subsistence of a rational nature' is applicable to Brahman, yet it does not enable Brahman to be described as personal in a sense which is relevant to the religious consciousness of God, which views Him as acting in love towards the world.

One of the most striking things to emerge from this study is that although there is a fundamental difference of emphasis in the Hindu and Christian traditions - while the personal is paramount in Christianity,

1 V.S. 1.i.5. 2 V.S. 1.iv.23.

it is a matter of debate in Hinduism - yet on closer inspection, there are some very important similarities in the thought patterns of each tradition. This encourages one to hope that each may have something to contribute to and to learn from the other. The similarity which I shall discuss now is a paradox which has been exhibited and discussed in detail as it occurs in the Christian tradition by A.O. Lovejoy.[1] I will try and show that the same paradox is also present in Hindu thought as it is presented in its monistic form and that a similar development has taken place in Hindu thought as has occurred in Christianity.

One difficulty which we have encountered repeatedly is that of relating the human to the divine, the empirical to the ultimate reality. The philosophical account of this problem which was to be elaborated by Christian theologians was first enunciated by Plato in the Timaeus. Lovejoy shows that in effect Plato put forward two conflicting ideas of God which resulted in two conflicting ideas of life and systems of value. These conflicting ideas were never openly admitted as such, but continued to haunt Christian theology in different expressions right through its development. They were an ideal of otherworldliness and an ideal of this-worldliness. I shall trace Lovejoy's account of these conflicting ideas in Christian thought and show how a similar conflict is also present in Hindu thought.

In Plato we find the origin of the strain of other-worldliness in Western religious thought. It is expressed in the belief that

'both the genuinely "ideal" and the truly good are radically antithetic in their essential characteristics to anything to be found in man's natural life.'[2]

1 The Great Chain of Being. 2 Lovejoy, Op. Cit., p.25.

The essence of the good

'lay in self-containment, freedom from all dependence upon that which is external to the individual.'[1]

and the result of this conviction when applied to God was that God could have no need of the world, and that from the divine point of view creatures could have no value. Taken to extremes, this view of the world sees the craving for a separate, personal immortality as constituting the root cause of the misery and vanity of existence. This is the expression of the belief that perfection implies self-sufficiency and immutability and is stated explicitly by Aristotle in the Eudaemonian Ethics. God can have no need of anything since

'One who is self-sufficient can have no need of the services of others, nor of their affection, nor of social life, since he is capable of living alone. This is especially evident in the case of God. Clearly, since he is in need of nothing God cannot have need of friends, nor will he have any.'[2]

This line of thought clearly parallels the description of Brahman as 'self-existent' and 'imperishable'. The assertion that Brahman is Sad cid ananda - being, consciousness, bliss -i.e.that Brahman is blissful, intelligent, being, has affinities with the Aristotelian conception of God as eternally engaged in self-contemplation and following from this, the conception of the ideal life as that of contemplation. The Hindu tradition of renunciation of the world and the achievement of a self-sufficiency which is indifferent to worldly concerns is also of a part with this way of thinking, and Shankara's distinction between the lower knowledge of the empirical world and the higher knowledge which completely negates empirical life

1 Ibid., p.42.

2 Aristotle, Eudaemonian Ethics, 12446-12456, quoted by Lovejoy, Op. Cit. p.47.

emphasises once more the 'otherworldliness' present in the Hindu tradition. As the belief that perfection must involve self-sufficiency and immutability was axiomatic to the Greeks, so it was also held by the Hindus. This is further demonstrated by the repeated attempts by different writers to show that the empirical world, though integrally related to the ultimate reality, could not impair that reality by its own transitoriness and dependence. So we find both in Greek-Christian and in Hindu thought a fundamental strain of 'otherworldliness', and this 'otherworldliness' represents an undeniable facet of the religious consciousness.

An immutable self-sufficient God, however, cannot explain the existence of a variegated, transitory, world and so some attempt must be made to explain the relation between the two. Plato says of the form of the Good in the Republic that it is

'to all things known the cause ..... of their existence and their reality.'[1]

Likewise Brahman must be regarded as the cause of the existence and reality of the empirical world. Plato explains how this can be in the Timaeus. God could begrudge existence to nothing that could conceivably possess it and 'desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be.' Consequently, out of the overflowing divine superabundance of being the empirical world was created. The idea of God's not grudging existence to anything is an attempt to reconcile the absolute self-sufficiency of the divine being with the obvious existence of the empirical world. Lovejoy points out that the implications of Plato's account of the origins of the empirical world are that the intelligible world is deficient without the sensible, i.e. that

1 Republic, 509B.

'The entire realm of essence ..... lacked what was indispensable to its meaning and worth so long as it lacked embodiment.'[1]

and that the fecundity of the Good is not the consequence of a free and arbitrary act of choice of a personal creator, but rather a dialectical necessity.

A similar difficulty in accounting for the existence of the empirical world on the assumption that the divine being is perfectly self-sufficient and immutable is answered in Hindu thought, by invoking the concept of līlā, play. The world is God's play. To the Western mind this assertion immediately suggests a trivialisation of empirical experience if not, as in the case of King Lear, the notion of the play of the gods as a kind of divine sadism. But in the Hindu context this is not so, and shorn of its emotive content the assertion that the world is the 'play' of Brahman evokes the same suggestion as in Plato of the world being the consequence of the overflowing of the divine superabundance of creative energy. Both explanations insist that the creation of the world was motiveless in the sense that it did not arise from any need present in the divine being, as such a being could have no need of anything. Shankara declares that the activity of the Lord may be supposed to be mere sport, proceeding from his own nature, without reference to any purpose.[2] S. Radhakrishnan, in his translation of the Brahma Sūtras quoted another Hindu writer, Baladeva, as saying that līlā is the overflow of joy within. Nevertheless, in spite of all efforts to the contrary, both Shankara and Plato are forced to acknowledge, even if only indirectly, a certain necessity in the existence of the empirical world. Superficially the assertion that the world is māyā, appearance, suggests no necessity for its

1 Lovejoy, Op. Cit., p.53. 2 V.S. 2.i.33.

existence, but when we enquire into the origin of māyā then we are faced with a beginningless mystery. Although māyā has not the status of an independent principle it cannot yet be identified with Brahman and its presence necessarily constitutes the empirical world. With Rāmānuja the necessity of the existence of the empirical world is more explicitly expressed since the world is described as the body of God, both His instrument and His means of self-expression.

So we get the same paradox present in both Hindu and Christian thought : a God who is at once self-sufficient and from whom the world follows as a necessary consequence; and we shall see that this paradox leads to the same discrepancy of practical ideals in each case; and that a similar modification occurs in each tradition in an attempt to mitigate the paradox and its results.

Lovejoy shows that what he calls the two gods of Plato, the self-sufficient being, and the god of creative fecundity, lead to an inner conflict in Medieval thought because they implied two irreconcileable conceptions of the Good. He says

'The final good for man ..... consisted of some mode of assimilation or approximation to the divine nature ..... The doctrine of divine attributes was thus also ..... a theory of the nature of ultimate value, and the conception of God was at the same time the definition of the objective of human life; ..... But the God in whom man was thus to find his own fulfilment was ..... not one God but two ..... The one was an apotheosus of unity, self-sufficiency and quietude, the other of diversity, self-transcendence and fecundity.'[1]

These two conceptions of God implied two incompatible notions of value.

'The one programme demanded a withdrawal from all "attachment to creatures"- culminated in the ecstatic contemplation of the individual Divine Essence; the other, if it had been formulated, would have

1 Lovejoy, Op. Cit., p.82.

summoned men to participate, in some finite measure, in the creative passion of God ..... it would have placed the active life above the contemplative.'[1]

This conflict of ideals can be seen in the writings of Thomas Aquinas who believed on the one hand that the creature approaches God's likeness more nearly when it acts for the good of other things, and on the other hand, that the final end of life was absorption in the contemplation of a God to whom one can communicate no good.

Similar conflicting conceptions of the good occur in Hindu thought. We have the ascetic view which sees moksha, the end and aim of life, as freedom from the shackles of empirical existence in the sense of achieving a complete transcendence of empirical experience and values. In contrast, the concept of dharma emphasises the development of the nature of each thing in accordance with its own laws and in accordance with its place in the divine order of things. The concept of dharma is applied to society as varnasrama dharma, the caste system and the four stages of life, which apart from its excrescences, simply states that each person has his appointed station and his duties in society, which he must fulfil if he is to obtain his highest good.[2] Once again we have a conflict between the active and the contemplative life.

On the metaphysical side the consequences of Plato's two gods are equally interesting. Since Plato's God would not begrudge existence to any possible being it followed that every possible being must exist and that, therefore, we must suppose a 'Chain of Being', which by minute gradations ascended from the lowest form of life to the highest viz. God. This conception was developed in the thought of Leibniz into the assertion that God had created the best of all possible worlds.

1 Ibid. p.84.

2. See R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism, O.U.P. 1966, pp. 108-14.

Such a view must entail that evil also has its own place in the general scheme and that apparent evil in the world is necessary in order for it to be the best world possible. The same view that evil is a necessary complement to the good in the world is implied by many of the representations of Hindu deities who to the Western eye appear to be completely amoral.

Finally, the notion of a chain of being in which each link has its own irreplaceable part to fulfil came to be seen as a rigid and static conception which gave no room for hope either to the individual or society, and it, therefore, became temporalised both in its Western and Hindu form. The difficulty was that if every link in the chain was necessary for the divine self-manifestation, then there was no possibility of man's being able to ascend the scale of being as had once been supposed and approach nearer to God, for this would be rebellion against the divine will. This led not only to an acquiescence in the condition of things as they were, but also to an attempt to invoke a divine justification for them. The same situation arose in India in relation to society and in particular the caste system. The solution in each case was to turn the chain of being into a temporal chain. In place of a fixed order of beings who approximated more nearly to the Divine came the idea that human beings and society were gradually evolving and improving in such a way as to approach more nearly to the divine excellence. Aurobindo's evolutionary philosophy may be seen as the exemplification of this development in Hindu terms.

Conclusion

In this Chapter we have been concerned to illuminate the conception of the personal as it is found in Shankara's and Rāmānuja's accounts of Brahman or the ultimate reality. It might have been thought more

logical to have begun with a study of the individual self and then proceeded from this to consider how far what has been predicated of the self could be predicated also of the ultimate reality. This would be unsatisfactory, however. What is apprehended by the religious consciousness must be taken as fundamental since this determines the view taken of the self and the development of practical ideals of life. (This is not to say that criticism of the apprehensions of religious consciousness is out of the question. It is obvious for example, that in dividing religions into major religions and the rest, we are applying some criteria to discriminate certain religions from others.) Consequently, the next Chapter will be devoted to the study of the Atman, the Self, and the following Chapter to moksha and dharma, the ideals which shape practical values and aims.

We have shown that the Hindu conception of Brahman is not wholly consistent, but contains two main strands, theistic and monistic, personal and impersonal, neither of which can claim precedence in time over the other. In general, however, there is a tendency to incorporate the theistic strand within the monistic as is done in the case of Shankara. This may take the form of arguing that while theism is true for the religious consciousness, monism in the only satisfactory philosophical account. We have rejected this solution and recognise the monistic account as the expression of an alternative type of religious consciousness, or, alternatively, as a different interpretation of the religious consciousness. The object of philosophy and religion must be one and the same. The religious consciousness of which Shankara's monism is the expression implies the adoption of the attitude of an impartial spectator, and in contrast, Rāmānuja's theism starts from the point of view of an intentional agent. We shall have more to say about this contrast in the following Chapter. The

metaphysical implications of this, however, are that in the one case thought is taken as the starting point and in the other, action.

When thought is taken as the starting point as in Shankara's system, a problem arises in accounting for the empirical world. Although the Absolute as pure thought must be completely self-sufficient, yet it must also be the cause of the empirical world and the latter must be necessarily related to the Absolute. This gives rise to paradoxical consequences which are reflected in Hindu life and culture. This question will be discussed again in Chapter Four.

If we compare these findings with what is present in the Christian tradition there are some remarkable similarities. Here too we do not find a single unified tradition, but an amalgam of Greek and Hebrew thought. We have seen that the Greek tradition in Christian thought has much in common with Shankara's account of nirguna Brahman, and that the starting point for metaphysics here is also thought. Arising out of this comes a similar difficulty in accounting for the existence of the empirical world. In spite of the predominance of what might be termed a thought-oriented, impersonal metaphysics in Christian thinking, however, the overall emphasis is on action inasmuch as God is conceived as one with whom we stand in personal relationship, who has a loving concern for the world.

It will be seen from the foregoing that a fundamental problem which arises in each tradition in very similar terms is that of explaining the existence of the empirical world and showing how it derives its meaning and significance. A thought-oriented metaphysics has in each case singularly failed to throw light on this important question and an 'action-oriented' metaphysics has yet to be adequately developed.

CHAPTER THREE - ĀTMAN

The Self : One Or Many?

Western philosophy takes it for granted that there are many, individual selves. The idea that each individual self is only a part of, or identical with one universal self is strange. It has to be proved. In Shankara's thought however, we start from the oneness of the Self and it is the apparent existence of a plurality of selves which calls for comment.

The reason for this springs from the nature of the religious experience which Shankara takes to be of ultimate value. This is summed up for him in the text, tat twam asi, that thou art. The individual self and the highest Brahman are ultimately one :

'the individual soul and the highest Self differ in name only.'[1]
'In reality there is only one universal Self.'[2]

This means that discussion of and evaluation of the self takes place in the context of the discussion of the nature of Brahman. Discussion of the individual self refers to the empirical self which is not ultimately real.

Another possible reason for Shankara's Ātman/Brahman identification lies in his polemic against the dualist Sāṁkhya system. Sāṁkhya holds that there are two basic, opposing principles : the intelligent purusha and the unintelligent prakṛti. The presence of purusha causes prakṛti to evolve by stages into the material world as we know it. For Shankara it was nonsense to suppose that an unintelligent principle like prakṛti could have been responsible for the evolution and existence of the world. Much of Shankara's commentary on the Brahma Sūtras is devoted to demonstrating the falsity and essential incoherence of dualism. He holds

1 Brahma Sūtra, 1.iv.22. 2 Ibid. 1.iii.6.

that it is not only contrary to Scripture, but also unreasonable to assume a multiplicity of independent principles to explain the world. In his zeal to demonstrate the unity of experience Shankara can find no half-way house and this leads him to assert the mathematical identity of Ātman and Brahman. Only by assuming absolute identity of self and deity can sense be made of religious experience and a reasonable explanation be given for the existence of the world. (This is not, of course, to say that Shankara is making the assertion 'I am God' in the sense in which this would be understood in a Christian context.) The consequence of this is that anything which implies an essential plurality must be regarded as māyā, not ultimately real. This means that empirical experience and personal relationships are relegated to the sphere of the not ultimately real and significant. Characteristics which can be attributed only to individual selves, i.e. the empirical multiplicity of selves, must inevitably be rated as of secondary importance. This means that it may be rash to accuse Shankara of neglecting 'personal' values. He can reply that he has had an experience which transcends personal values and makes them irrelevant. It is not that they are misconceived : on the empirical level they are perfectly valid. Life could not be carried on without a respect for individuals and a sense of individual responsibility. But when identity with Brahman is realised then the empirical world is seen to be māyā. It is not completely real though neither is it completely unreal. It is anirvacanīya, indefinable.

The individual person is then of secondary importance from the start. Shankara begins from the religious experience of the ultimate reality in which Brahman, the universal self, is everything. It is in the light of this experience that the nature of the individual self is examined.

Shankara's Metaphysical Starting Point

A further determinant of Shankara's position is the metaphysical presupposition that only the unchanging is real. Consequently, his arguments are intended to show that there is something absolutely unchanging which has permanent value in our awareness of ourselves. It is this unchanging element which determines the nature of man and the values which he adopts.

Shankara assumes that only the unchanging can be real in an absolute sense. The expression 'real in an absolute sense' is not altogether clear. Those like Shankara who make a distinction between different degrees of reality usually think that the unchanging is more real than the changing. But what does this amount to saying? If the unchanging is more real simply because it persists this is to say that real is synonymous with unchanging. But this means that to say that only the unchanging is absolutely real is just to say that only the unchanging is unchanging and this is not to say a great deal. Why should the quality of unchangeableness be accepted as the criterion of reality? Are there not other qualities with an equal claim to be regarded as criteria? For example, pleasureableness, intensity, effectiveness.

If only the unchanging is real then the body cannot be real. Neither can the thoughts and impressions which succeed one another in the mind. We must find an unchanging awareness behind the changing thoughts and actions. Shankara identifies this as cit, consciousness or intelligence. (In translating cit as intelligence it must be carefully distinguished from buddhi, the intellect which is the organ responsible for discursive thought.)

Cit

Some remarks on the translation and interpretation of cit are necessary as

there is no Western equivalent which precisely fits its sense. An older commentator like Thibaut translates cit by cognition and although this is not a technical term which is in current use it may turn out to be the nearest equivalent. The translations, 'conscousness', 'intelligence', or 'awareness' have all been used in different contexts, as has the term 'thought'. Thought is a fairly accurate translation : it implies consciousness and intelligence. On the other hand, it is misleading to the Western reader who does not draw the Hindu's distinction between the activity of cit and of manas, but terms both 'thought'. In Chapter One we saw that the Hindu analysis distinguishes the self not only from the body, but also from the mind which is regarded as being a subtle material. Where the Western writer distinguishes between the mind and the body, the Hindu distinguishes the self, the mind and the body. The activities of perception, judgement and discursive thought, all of which might come under the general label of 'thought' in the Western tradition are regarded as the functions of manas by the Hindu, and as quite distinct from cit, which is the illuminator of these functions. The nearest Western equivalent of cit is probably Kant's 'transcendental unity of apperception'. Kant makes a sharp distinction between the contents of thought and that which is aware of and unifies these contents and calls the latter the 'transcendental unity of apperception'. This is simply a bare unity, but a unity without which we could not imagine the possibility of mental activity and of our experience of ourselves as persons. Carrying the comparison further, it would probably not be unreasonable to talk about the transcendental unity of apperception as illuminating the contents of thought in the same way that cit is said to illuminate manas. It would be a good metaphor inasmuch as our mental experience or indeed any experience could not occur in the form which it does

without this 'transcendental unity'. If we can imagine a series of thoughts without this 'transcendental unity' they would be simply a sequence of activity which was inherently meaningless because not apprehended by anyone and, therefore, not combined into a unity by anyone. But when they are illuminated by someone's thinking them then they immediately stand out and reveal their character as thought and in the course of doing this, also make us aware of the transcendental unity which brings them into being. The phrase, 'transcendental unity of apperception' is, however, cumbersome and in what follows I propose to translate cit simply as'consciousness'.

I have mentioned 'cognition' above as a possible translation of cit and will say a few words about this. One reason why 'cognition' is not in current philosophical use is that it is rather a broad term which covers the whole spectrum of mental activity from bare awareness of something to an apprehension of that thing which could be classified as knowledge. Current philosophical interest lies in classifying different kinds of mental activity rather than differentiating mental activity as a whole from other things. Cognition in this context is too broad and, therefore, too vague a term to be of practical use. However, there seems to be a certain vagueness in the term 'cit' which is successfully captured in the translation 'cognition'. Those Hindu writers who discuss cit in relation to the Ātman or to Brahman appear to have no fixed translation of the term and to subsume what to the Western mind are totally different concepts under the same term 'cit'. Thus in the same breath, Brahman may be referred to as a mass of consciousness, or of intelligence or even knowledge and there is no indication that the writer considers himself to be saying different things. This is remarkable when we consider how scrupulously careful classical Hindu commentators are in choosing the right word

to convey their precise meaning. We would expect their modern counterparts to exercise equal discretion. The fact that they do use a great variety of words with different connotations to translate the single term 'cit' is an indication not of looseness of thought, but of the 'open-endedness' of the concept itself. As well as indicating the transcendental unity of apperception, cit also indicates the essence of mental activity, though perhaps the term 'activity' is ill-chosen as cit cannot be said to act.

I would suggest that one of the main reasons for ambiguity in terms such as cit and its derivative, caitanya, is that they are taken by Hindu writers as the differentiae of the personal. For example, Rāmānuja says,

'Analogously to the lamp, the self is essentially intelligent (cid-rupa), and has intelligence (caitanya) for its essential nature. And to be essentially intelligent means to be self-luminous.'[1]

In other words, the defining mark of our experience as human beings is the presence of cit or some other related term. It is no wonder then that the meaning of these terms should appear both to be patently clear and also surprisingly confused when it is considered that each writer has his own ideas as to how exactly the differentiae of the personal should be analysed and described. Cit is to the Hindu what rationality was to the Greeks and still is to the West. It is significant that Aristotle also uses the analogy of light to describe reason and 'reason' might also be considered as a translation of cit since it is both sufficiently exact to indicate the range of experience which cit covers and sufficiently vague to leave the precise delineation of cit as a matter for discussion.

1 Brahma Sūtra, 1.i.1.

The Relation Of Consciousness To The Empirical Self

Cit, the true self, is in no sense an agent. It is not to be regarded as the originator of thoughts and actions. The self cannot be an agent because

'an act cannot exist without modifying that in which it abides.'[1]

If the self were an agent it would be subject to modification and, therefore, changing. What is it then that acts? It is the principle of egoity, the ahamkāra. This is the notion of oneself which one has through faulty introspection and the misidentifying of oneself with the body or the mind or some other object. Shankara says

'it is only this ..... principle of egoity, the object of the notion of the ego and the agent in all cognition, which accomplishes all actions and enjoys their result.'[2]

The true self does not act : it is the underlying awareness behind the empirical acting ego.

Another reason Shankara gives why the self cannot be regarded as an agent in its real nature is that if this were so then final release would be impossible. This is because, according to Shankara, final release is an unchanging state while being an agent is to be always in a changing state. Further Shankara points out, that 'activity is essentially painful'[3] and final release is a state of absolute bliss.

Criticism Of Shankara

What are we to make of Shankara's account of the self? Does it permit of any answer to questions regarding personal identity? The Western philosophical tradition has concerned itself with the interplay of bodily and mental criteria such as memory as the criteria of personal identity. Here in contrast is an account of the self which refuses to associate it at all with bodily or mental experience. It may be

1 Brahma Sūtra, 1.i.4. 2 Ibid. 3 Ibid. 2.iii.40.

objected that such an account is essentially meaningless since it can have no content. It seems to leave us with a totally disembodied being - a ghost, but without even a machine. As Stuart Hampshire has put it,

'I do not know how I would identify myself as a disembodied being, and I do not know what this hypothesis means.'[1]

It is important to realise that the presuppositions of Shankara and of Hampshire are totally different so that the type of account given by Hampshire misses the point so far as Shankara is concerned. Hampshire, presupposes the ultimacy of a plurality of individual selves, whereas Shankara who started from the premiss that the Self or Brahman are one is not concerned with the question of identifying an individual, disembodied being. As far as Shankara is concerned, Hampshire would be referring to the empirical self and naturally the activities of the individual empirical self must be understood in terms of empirical experience which includes bodily and mental experience. Shankara would have no quarrel over this. The ground is cut from beneath the feet of those who would criticise along these lines. For Shankara the fact that his account of the self has no 'content' is a point in its favour for if it did have a content then it could only be an account of the empirical self. Pursuing the logic of the argument, by applying Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernables then if cit or the transcendental unity of apperception for me cannot be distinguished from the consciousness which you experience, then there is every reason for concluding that they are one and the same. From there it is but a short step to identifying the inner principle of unity with the outer principle of unity in experience and we arrive at the equation of Ātman and Brahman.[2]

1 Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action, Chatto and Windus, 1959, p.48.

2 See also Note 1 on Chapter Three.

Once the assumption is made that the plurality of individual selves are unreal, then Shankara's account of the Ātman as cit, consciousness, becomes plausible. It does, however, leave us with some problems. One of these concerns the sense in which cit, consciousness, may be predicated of the individual self and Brahman. Inasmuch as the Ātman and Brahman are taken to be identical, cit must have the same meaning when applied to Brahman as it has in its application to Ātman. If cit is interpretated as equivalent to the transcendental unity of apperception it cannot be identified with any kind of bodily or mental activity. The fact remains however, that our apprehension of cit is very much bound up with our experience of bodily and mental activity : consciousness in our experience is always consciousness of something even although we may be able to differentiate between the something and our consciousness of it. It is difficult to make sense of the notion of pure consciousness with no object at all. Shankara admits in one passage, that the transmigrating soul needs a body in order that it may acquire knowledge. He contrasts the case of Brahman who has no need of a body with that of the individual self:

'Brahman, whose nature is eternal cognition - as the sun's nature is eternal luminousness - can impossibly stand in need of any instruments of knowledge. The transmigrating soul (saṁsārin) ..... which is under the sway of nescience, etc., may require a body in order that knowledge may arise in it; but not so the Lord, who is free from all impediments of knowledge.'[1]

The Experiential Basis Of Consciousness

The relation of the body and the mind to the real self is described by Shankara as superimposition. He defines superimposition as

'the apparent presentation, in the form of remembrance, to consciousness of something previously observed, in some other thing.'[2]

1 Brahma Sūtras 1.i.5. 2 Brahma Sūtras 1.i.

In other words the attributes of the body and mind are mistakenly considered as attributes of the real self. But attributes are only predicated of objects and the self is not an object. This difficulty is got round by saying that the real self (pratyagātman) is not

'non-object in the absolute sense. For it is the object of the notion of the ego and the interior self is well-known to exist in account of its immediate (intuitive) presentation.'[1]

In the same way blueness is superimposed on the sky which is not in itself an immediate object of perception. The sky is like the real self. It would not be perceived were it not for the blueness which in actual fact is no part of the sky. But in turn the blueness could not appear if there were no sky. Likewise it is meaningless to talk about mental and bodily activity apart from its illumination by the real self. The superimposition in the case of the real self and the internal organ is a two-way matter.

'Thus the producer of the notion of the Ego (i.e. the internal organ) is superimposed on the interior self, which, in reality, is the witness of all the modifications of the internal organ, and vice versa, the interior self ..... is superimposed on the internal organ, the senses and so on.'[2]

The difficulty here is that there appears to be such mutual inter-dependence between the 'internal self' and the 'internal organ' as to make it impossible to conceive of the one without the other. Shankara himself admits that without consciousness mental activity would be incomprehensible. But why on the other hand should consciousness by itself be supposed a viable proposition? We can point to the case of deep sleep where self-awareness may be supposed to span the interval during which we are asleep

1 Ibid. 2 Ibid.

and not involved in any activity. Yet this is not pure consciousness; the body continues to function. If the body is dead then we can assume no such continuity of self-awareness. The notion of self-awareness or consciousness can not be made sense of except in conjunction with a physical body, even although that body is not engaged in overt action. The case is similar to that found in David Hume's familiar account of our discrimination of shape and colour with regard to the cubes and the sphere. As colour and shape are discriminable, but inseparable, so are consciousness and conscious activity. The mind and body are often described by Shankara as 'limiting adjuncts' which hinder our realisation of the true nature of the self as pure consciousness. The metaphor is used of the air which is the same substance whether or not it is enclosed in pots and pans. The difficulty, however, is to make any sense of the notion of consciousness apart from our experience of it in association with its limiting adjuncts. Shankara's belief that the body is a hindrance to us in obtaining knowledge of Brahman is similar to the platonic view that our bodies hinder us in acquiring knowledge. Plato draws an analogy with the bird which is hindered from reaching the uppermost heaven by the air. To this it might well be replied that if it were not for the air the bird would not be able to fly at all. In a similar way Shankara argues that the material elements such as the body and the senses prevent us from obtaining the true knowledge of Brahman; to which we can equally reply that were it not for the body and the senses we should have no knowledge at all.

Consciousness As Predicated Of Brahman

If the concepts of consciousness and the contents of consciousness are interdependent, discriminable but not separable, what are we to make of consciousness as applied to Brahman? Cit or pure consciousness is one of Shankara's favourite ways of describing Brahman. Pursuing the line of

our preceding argument, we must either find a sense of cit, consciousness, in which it is totally independent of any bodily functioning, or conclude that Shankara is using the term in a different sense when he applies it to Brahman. Neither alternative is acceptable. Shankara's position depends on the possibility of predicating consciousness both of what is experienced by the individual self and what is experienced by the universal Brahman. Continually he appeals to the experiential nature of cit, consciousness. Yet we have been unable to give any coherent sense to the notion of a consciousness which functions quite independently of the bodily activity which is its regular concomitant in our experience.

Returning to our experience of consciousness, it is clear that our awareness of our consciousness is a fleeting and imperfect thing. Most of the time we are aware of the objects of which we are conscious and it requires a fair degree of sophistication to distinguish the objects of consciousness from the awareness of consciousness itself. Brahman, however, must be supposed to be eternally conscious. If cit is one and the same when predicated of the individual and of Brahman then how can there be an eternal consciousness which is some of the time not conscious? Shankara appears to be involved here in a difficulty which Rāmānuja escapes. Rāmānuja distinguishes between consciousness and the subject who is conscious. Like Shankara, he holds that the term means the same when applied to the individual and to Brahman, but his explanation of the experiential difference between the two cases is based on the supposed expansion and contraction of consciousness in the states of release and saṁsāra. Thus the individual's experience of consciousness is different from that of Brahman because they are two different subjects and although they are both conscious in the same sense, it is not unreasonable to suppose them conscious in different degrees.

The Reality Of An Unchanging Consciousness

We have seen that there is some difficulty in finding an experiential basis for the concept of a consciousness which functions independently of bodily activity and is one and the same when applied to the individual and to Brahman. Apart from these practical difficulties, the metaphysical presupposition of an unchanging reality may also be questioned.[1] Is such a concept coherent or does it contain contradictory notions?

Like Plato in the Timaeus, Shankara asserts that the existence of the One is eternal, necessary, unchanging. W.C. Kneale has shown the incoherence of the Timaeus doctrine of timeless life which was later to be adopted by Christian theologians and applied to God. Similar considerations may be applied to Shankara's doctrine of the unchanging Brahman.

The difficulty lies in making sense of a reality which is both conscious and unchanging. We have already argued that it is impossible to give a meaning to the notion of a consciousness which functions independently of bodily activity. While we can separate the awareness of consciousness from the awareness of the contents of consciousness we have no independent experience of consciousness itself. Since consciousness and the activity of consciousness are inseparable, change must be regarded as an inseparable feature of consciousness. All consciousness involves awareness of happenings in time. It might be argued that although our experience of consciousness is inseparable from the activity of consciousness, yet the actual awareness of consciousness is an awareness of an unchanging something which is not involved in time. It is true that the 'transcendental unity of consciousness' is a bare,

1 See W.C. Kneale, Eternity, P.A.S. Vol. 61 (1960-61), pp. 87-108.

self-identical unity. It is unchanging at whatever point of time we are aware of it. While the nature of the contents of consciousness may be affected by the passing of time the nature of the awareness of the contents of consciousness remains unchanged and hence appears to stand outside time. Further while the contents of consciousness are affected by sundry factors, there could be no contents of consciousness and so no experience at all as we understand it without the awareness of consciousness. Hence the plausibility of describing consciousness as necessary, as well as unchanging and eternal.

But here we come to the difficulty. It may be correct up to a point to describe consciousness as atemporal, necessary and unchanging. But what sort of reality has this thing that we are describing? If our foregoing arguments are correct, consciousness cannot be regarded as having any independent reality whatever. It is something which as far as we know only exists in conjunction with changing experience. It is an aspect of that experience but no more than an aspect. It is a feature of life but not the whole of it, and life as a whole is inseparable from temporality and change. Arguments from the nature of consciousness considered in itself to the nature of reality are on the same footing as arguments from the nature of mathematical truths. The necessity of mathematical truths gives us no grounds for concluding that the existence which manifests mathematical properties is necessary. Mathematical properties are an aspect of reality and not the whole of it. Likewise consciousness is an aspect of reality and there are no grounds for supposing that what is true of consciousness is true of reality as a whole.

One of the metaphors which Shankara applies to both Brahman and the individual self in order to explain what he means by characterising them

as cognition or consciousness is that of light. Shankara says

'Brahman, whose nature is eternal cognition as the sun's nature is eternal luminousness.'[1] and 'eternal intelligence is the essential nature of the soul.'[2] Further that 'The absence of actual intelligising is due to the absence of objects, not to the absence of intelligence; just as the light pervading space is not apparent due to the absence of things to be illuminated, not to the absence of its own nature.'[3]

The nature of the self is like light. It is luminous and as light pervades space so the self is pervasive. If objects stand in the path of the light then they obstruct the light and cast as shadows.

The true nature of the light is only adequately manifested when there are no objects to obstruct it. Conversely, Shankara notes the light itself may not be noticed when there are no objects to be illuminated. This situation occurs in deep sleep. Then, according to Shankara, consciousness shines with its own light, but we are not aware of it as there are no objects for it to illumine. But what sense can be made of saying that consciousness shines with its own light if we are not aware of its shining and there is no evidence of its shining? Ramānuja, as we shall see, found this an intolerable supposition.

Consciousness As Self-Luminous

On the face of it, Shankara is making contradictory assertions. He asks us to accept that the true nature of light is only manifested when there are no objects to obstruct it, and also that in a situation in which there are no objects for the light to shine on the light itself may not be noticed. If the first statement is true then it is difficult to see how we could fail to be aware of the light when there were no longer any obstructions to its shining.

1 Brahma Sūtra, 1.i.5. 2 Ibid. 2.iii.18. 3 Ibid.

When the metaphor is applied to consciousness, however, we get the statement that the true nature of consciousness is manifested when there are no objects of which to be conscious coupled with the assertion that there are some situations, such as that in which we are in a deep sleep, when we are conscious of no objects and yet are unaware of consciousness itself. To the Western mind these are puzzling statements which may be made no less puzzling when coupled with the Upanishadic quartet of ascending states : waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and the realisation of the ātman. This ascending series of states of consciousness allows for the possibility of two conditions, dreamless sleep, in which we are unaware of objects yet also unaware of the true nature of the self or consciousness, and a more exalted condition in which we are unaware of objects but aware of the true nature of the self. The suggestion that we are nearer to our true selves when we are asleep rather than when we are awake is an odd one. When we are asleep we are doing nothing, there is a momentary hiatus in the history of our lives, a temporary suspension of the experiences which individualise us from the rest of humanity. How can we be more ourselves in such a condition?

To make sense of these ideas we must remember that the touchstone of reality for Shankara is not our experience of ourselves as individuals, related to and relating ourselves to the kaleidoscopic transformations of life, but rather the mystical experience of ecstatic bliss in which the oneness of the self and the ultimate reality, Brahman, is realised. This has as its corollary the assumption that there is only one real self and that, therefore, the empirical awareness which individuals have of themselves is not ultimate. In the light of the bliss of Brahman in which there is no longer any awareness of the empirical world, we can see the resemblance to this of the state of deep sleep from which empirical experience is also absent.

In spite of this resemblance, however, there is an important difference between the state of ecstatic bliss in which identity with Brahman is realised and the state of deep sleep that may seem more relevant than the similarity they have in both being devoid of experience of empirical objects. In the former state there is an awareness which is absent from the latter. We have said that cit, consciousness, is equivalent to the transcendental unity of apperception, the principle of self-awareness which makes us aware from one moment to the next of the coherence and meaning of our experiences by connecting them together as our experiences. This self-awareness is not always with us. We are not aware of ourselves when we are asleep or unconscious. Yet something bridges these periods for we realise afterwards that we are the same person as we were previously. If it is necessary to assume that there is something present during these periods of unconsciousness then that something can only be a species of the self-awareness which constitutes our personal unity when we are awake. This is the significance of Shankara's statement that consciousness continues to shine with its own light even when we are not aware of it.

This explanation, however, serves once again to pinpoint the difficulties in Shankara's position. What is the nature of this self-awareness of which we are not always aware? Is such a concept coherent at all? How is the ecstatic bliss of Brahman related to our self-awareness? Without wishing to doubt the validity of the mystical experience which provides the experiential core of Shankara's philosophy, one wonders whether, in linking the analysis of the state of mystical bliss with an analysis of self-awareness, Shankara manages to provide an adequate account of either. Is there not here a conflation of distinct ideas?

Proof Of The Self

The picture of the self which emerges from Shankara's writings is

determined by the presupposition that the real must be unchanging, by the nature of religious experience and by the need to refute current dualistic philosophy. These factors lead Shankara to describe the self as the constant awareness behind the changing thoughts and actions which make up the empirical self. The true self takes no part in changing empirical experience : it is only the witness of these things. It is variously described as awareness, intelligence, thought, prefixed by the epithet 'pure'. This term 'pure' indicates that the terms are to be taken as applied to an unchanging reality.

It seems at first sight that there can be no relation between the real self and the empirical self and that we can never be aware of the real self in the way that we are aware of our continuous empirical existence. Yet the real self is the ground of the empirical self and Shankara holds that its existence is self-evident. Shankara's argument in proof of this is very similar to the argument of Descartes' cogito. Descartes, although he could doubt the evidence of his senses could not doubt that he was actually thinking and he, therefore, arrived at the conclusion that the incontrovertible awareness of his thinking was the evidence of his real existence. Shankara argues that the existence of the self is self-evident from the fact that everyone thinks and is aware of his thinking :

'Everyone admits the existence of the self and not (i.e. and does not say) that he does not exist.'[1]

Shankara then proceeds to identify the self in question with Brahman. Here the similarity to Descartes ends. For Descartes the cogito proved the existence of the individual self : for Shankara it is Brahman, the universal self that is indicated. The fact that two thinkers should reach such different conclusions from similar premisses leads one to

1 Brahma Sūtra, 1.i.1., translation by Dr. J.L. Brockington.

suspect the argument. Yet reasons for this divergence can be indicated. Descartes is writing in the context of the Christian tradition where an assertion of the identity of the individual self and the universal self would be heresy. As we have already noted, however, from a logical point of view there is much to commend the identity. If we can point to no factor differentiating my awareness of myself from your awareness of yourself inasmuch as they are both sheer awareness, it is economical to conclude that they are one and the same. And from this it is but a short step to the assertion that the individual awareness is simply a part of the universal awareness and so identical with it.

The Self-Evidence Of The Self

Shankara affirms the self-evidence of the self.

'Just because it is the self, it is impossible for us to entertain the idea of its being capable of refutation.'[1]

The knowledge of the self is described as 'self-established' in contrast to the 'adventitious' knowledge which is obtained through the pramānas or means of knowledge. Shankara says

'as the nature of the Self is eternal presence ..... we cannot even conceive that it should ever become something different from what it is.'[2]

What is meant by describing the self as an unchanging awareness, 'eternal presence' which is 'self-established'? Is there any such self-evident awareness in our experience?

The fact that something is self-evident does not imply that we are always aware of it or that when it is drawn to our attention we are unfailingly accurate in our awareness of it. If two plus two equals four be an example of a self-evident truth then it is obvious that we are not always aware of it and that it is possible to apprehend it falsely as a child

1 Brahma Sūtra, 2.iii.7. 2 Ibid.

may in learning addition. Similarly, to describe the self as self-evident need not necessarily imply that we are always aware of it or preclude the possibility of our being mistaken as to its nature.

We have already seen that consciousness interpreted as the transcendental unity of apperception may be described as necessary, unchanging and eternal. We cannot argue from this, however, that consciousness has an independent existence : on the contrary it only exists as part of a whole which is constituted by the activity of a conscious agent. Consequently, to say that consciousness is necessary and eternal is to say no more about it than can be said about mathematical truths. The fact that mathematical truths are eternally necessary does not confer a superior degree of reality on them. Similarly, to say that consciousness is necessary and unchanging is not to assert the existence of something which is more real than the changing experience of which consciousness is a part : it is simply to state that we do have experience. To suppose that we are saying more than this is to suppose that the 'transcendental unity of apperception' is a definite something, an impression or intuition, and not simply a bare unity which affords the possibility of experience.

An Impression Of The Self?

I have suggested that the intuition of the self which Shankara claims as the touchstone of his philosophy may be comparable to the impression of the self which David Hume sought and failed to find. Hume could find no constant impression which would confer personal identity and hence concluded that the self-identity of the self was no more than a convenient fiction of our practical lives which could not be adequately accounted for by reason. It was simply the result of a tendency of the mind to run so quickly over a succession of slightly different perceptions

that it mistakenly ascribes the series to a single identical source and thus imagines a mysterious unity underlying the apparent and visible diversity. Shankara, in contrast, claims to have found the single identical source of the unity of experience in an intuition of the self, though this self is not to be identified with the individual self with which Hume was concerned.

Both Hume and Shankara assume that once an intuition of the self is found then this does account for the unity of experience and give a basis for personal identity. Is this a correct assumption? Supposing that Hume had found his impression of the self would it have been able to do the job required of it? What sort of unity would it have given to experience and how would it have integrated the different activities of the self?

It is not immediately obvious that such a constant impression would make a difference to our experience. So long as its only difference from other impressions is that it is continuous whereas the others are momentary it is simply another impression. It is on the same level as every other and one is tempted to say to one who claims to have such an impression, 'So what?' Whatever the nature of such an impression, it could not by itself provide an explanation of anything until related in some way to the totality of the experience which it accompanies. A constant impression, just as much as a momentary impression, still requires the assumption of an underlying personal unity which is more than an impression in order to account for experience.

This has an application to Shankara's thought. If what I have said is correct it is not enough for Shankara to claim an intuition of the self. Such an intuition, however pressing its claim may appear at the moment of insight, can have no value until related to the rest of experience. The act of relating an intuition to experience is an act of the self. This

means that the essence or unity of the self cannot reside solely in the impression or intuition.

Although it may appear that experience occurs to us already labelled with its significance, this is not the case. We have to make sense of a 'blooming, buzzing confusion'. The significance which we attach to our various experiences is the result of an extensive period of learning to weave what we experience into a single meaningful whole.

What, however, of experiences such as that of the mystic, in which the 'whole' of everyday life is to all intents and purposes transcended? Does mystical experience contradict the claim that no impression in itself can be significant and valuable?

No mystical experience occurs completely in a void. Mystics live within different traditions and are influenced by different modes of thought. While in the mystical state, ordinary experience may appear to be entirely superceded, yet when it comes to making assertions about that state this must be done in everyday language. The mystical state must be shown to have some relevance to everyday life or it could never be regarded as a goal. There are many experiences in which ordinary life becomes irrelevant but they do not thereby qualify as mystical experiences or as revelations of the true nature of the self. To one in a state of exhaustion, sleep appears sheer bliss. Sleep, however, is not generally regarded as having any transcendental significance. (An exception to this occurs in Hindu thought where, as we have seen, dreamless sleep is regarded as being next door to the state of transcendental bliss in the ascending series of waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and the realisation of the ātman.) The reason for this is that when normality returns, this state is seen to be insignificant in relation to life as a whole. It does

not transform our understanding of life in any way. One important test of the authenticity of the mystic's experience, however, is that it does transform his life. This experience becomes of supreme importance to him and his ordinary life becomes viewed in terms of it. The reality of the mystical state is understood in contrast to the reality of the other experiences which it illuminates. This means that whatever impressions of the self may be revealed in experience, any account of the self which fails to include an account of the activity of the self in relating these impressions to the rest of experience, must be deficient.

Shankara's account of the self is deficient in this way since he treats the self as being revealed in an intuition which transcends experience. Nothing is left of ordinary experience in the full realisation of the Brahman/Ātman identification. We cannot refer to this state, however, without implying a reference to ordinary experience and to the relation between the two. It is essential to the nature of the mystical state that it should be able to be referred to or it could not become a goal for human life. Unless this is possible the state of transcendence becomes meaningless apart from the time one is involved in it. During this time it is impossible to distinguish the special nature of this experience from that of other experiences of ordinary life which at the time of experiencing them seem particularly significant, but later on turn out not to be so. What this means is that the self cannot be identified with any impression or intuition since this leaves us with the problem of relating the intuition to the rest of experience, which must be the work of the self yet cannot be done by an intuition.

Knowing Subject Or Agent?

In Chapter One we distinguished two aspects of the term 'person' within the Christian tradition; 'that which indicates a self-conscious,

intelligent, independent being and that which indicates a centre of volunatry, purposeful social activity'. We argued that it is the latter aspect which is more distinctively Christian although the former element may have been more philosophically prominent as a result of the influence of Greek thought on the Christian tradition. The first aspect emphasises knowledge as the essence the person;the second emphasises action. Is the self or person primarily a knower or an agent?

The evaluation of the self as a knower or an agent has repercussions in the social and moral spheres. A tradition which takes knowing as its standpoint must account for action and show the relevance of action to a life which is seen from the position of the knowing subject. Where action is central, agency must be shown to include the capacity for knowledge. As it is the actions of persons which together constitute social life and raise moral issues, it follows that the importance which one attaches to action will be reflected in the standpoint from which one views the individual and vice versa. For example, if the individual is viewed primarily as a knowing subject then error becomes a problem of misperception and the existence of others becomes problematic as they only exist as part of the experience of the knowing subject. Social and moral issues logically play a secondary role. On the other hand, if the individual is primarily an agent error becomes not misperception, but misdoing. This gives priority to ethical and social considerations.

John MacMurray's Analysis Of The Self[1]

John MacMurray compares these two opposing points of view : that which treats the self as primarily a thinker and that which starts from the point of view of the self as agent. His analyses have an interesting application to Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts of the self.

1 The Self As Agent, Faber & Faber, 1957.

He argues that Western philosophy since the time of Descartes has been vitiated by the adoption of the egocentric standpoint of the knowing subject for whom the world is an object. Once the indubitability of the cogito is accepted as fundamental, certain conclusions inevitably follow. My existence becomes viewed in terms of my awareness of my thinking. In other words, my relation to my experience becomes that of knowing subject to object of thought. This has the effect of making the self reflective in character and of withdrawing it from the field of action. Everything, and this includes action, is viewed as primarily an object of my thought. As an object of my thought, experience becomes something which I contemplate but in which I take no active part. 'The self in reflection is self-isolated from the world which it knows.'[1] Not only this, but the existence of others becomes problematic. Although I cannot doubt the fact that I am thinking I can very well doubt the nature of what I am thinking. I could well be mistaken or some malignant demon could be deceiving me. This means that I can have no guarantee of the real existence of the other people who occur as objects of my thought. Solipsism is unavoidable.

Since experience has become an object of my thought, it must be seen as something determinate. It is an object of contemplation rather than something which allows the possibility of change through action. Looked at from the opposite angle, action as it is commonly understood presupposes both that we are free to initiate change and that the world is still indeterminate to a degree which will allow for the possibility of its determination through action. As knowing subjects, however, we can only contemplate our experience, not change it, for to assert that we can change our experience is immediately to grant it a reality on a par with the reality which we attribute to ourselves. This would be to deny

1 Op. Cit. p.11.

the premiss of the cogito; hence we are faced with the conclusion that action is illusory.

The analysis which MacMurray gives of the self as knowing subject bears similarities to aspects of Shankara's thought. Solipsism occurs in both. Whereas this is a perennial problem for Western philosophers, it is as we have seen, no problem for Shankara. The tradition within which he writes has no uncompromising monotheism to contend with so that he is able to follow through the logic of the argument to the conclusion that there is and can be only one real subject. A further similarity occurs in MacMurray's account of the world as an object of contemplation and Shankara's account of the relation of the 'witness-self' to the world. The 'witness-self' is the impassive observer, the onlooker who simply contemplates the world, taking no active part for he realises that the world with all its change and diversity is not ultimately real.

In place of the self as knowing subject MacMurray wishes to put the self as agent. This, he argues, is a more comprehensive conception since knowledge is included in the agency of the self. The 'I do' includes 'I know that I do'. I may be aware of the world without doing anything in it but what I do in the world I must be aware of doing. Further, all our knowledge must have, directly or indirectly, a practical reference. Knowledge is for the sake of action :

'theoretical activities have their origins ..... in ..... practical requirements ..... and they also find their meaning and significance in the practical field .....'.[1]

MacMurray goes on to apply his conclusions to the field of religion. If we accept that all our knowledge has a practical reference, then he argues, we can give an account of our experience which tends to a

1 Ibid. p.21.

theistic conclusion and gives religion its proper place. If, on the other hand, we adopt the standpoint of the knowing subject for whom the world is an object of knowledge, atheism becomes inevitable.

These are far-reaching conclusions, but according to MacMurray

'The conflict between religion and atheism turns, in large part at least, on the issue whether the process of the world is intentional or not.'[1]

This means that when we adopt the standpoint of an agent we acknowledge the importance of intention in understanding the world and

'To think the world in practical terms is ultimately to think the unity of the world as one action, and therefore as informed by a unifying intention.'[2]

This prima facie implies a supreme Agent whose act the world is. On the other hand, if the reflective subject is taken as fundamental then there is no place for intention in thinking the unity of the world and, therefore, no place for personal agency. This for MacMurray is equivalent to atheism for he assumes that

'it is characteristic of religion that it behaves towards its object in ways that are suitable to personal intercourse; and the conception of a deity is the conception of a personal ground of all that we experience.'[3]

We can suppose that MacMurray would regard Shankara's monism as a type of atheism inasmuch as Shankara's ultimate reality, nirguna Brahman, is in no sense an agent. If we accept this then MacMurray's account of the point at issue between religion and atheism agrees with what we find to be the case in the development of Shankara and Rāmānuja's thought. In Shankara's case the treatment of the self as primarily a reflective subject who in no sense really interacts with the empirical world goes along with his account of ultimate reality as in no way informed by

1 Ibid. p.222 2 Ibid. p.221. 3 Ibid. p.17.

intention and to be conceived of, therefore, in completely impersonal terms. On the other hand, Rāmānuja's insistency on the agency of the self of whom reflective consciousness is only an attribute and not the essence is correlated with his theism.

MacMurray's claim that the ground of religion is our experience of personal relationship, leading to the conclusion when applied to Shankara that his Advaitism is a kind of atheism, is sweeping but by no means new. Rāmānuja's theism was intended as a reinstatement and defence of religion against Shankara's claims which denied them and we have already noted that monism has never been popular with the rank and file of Hindus.

But can it be accepted that the ground of genuine religion is our experience of personal relationship? MacMurray appears to accept this as an article of faith rather than offer any reasoned defence of the position. In relation to the Christian religion it is probably correct but it does not cover the mystical experience which is central to Advaitic religion. We have already in Chapter One noted the tendency of religious thinkers on either side of the fence to assume too readily that their own particular brand of religious experience is the fundamental one and that the differences in others' experience may be ironed out so that they conform to one norm. Shankara's non-dualism must be accepted as an account of a genuine type of religious awareness which is not grounded in personal relationship but in the concept of sthitaprajna, the man of steady understanding. Compared with the theist's position, Shankara's nirguna Brahman may seem like no god at all, and therefore to be atheism, but this is an unwarranted conclusion. We must accept the non-dualist religious awareness in its own terms and seek to understand it from within rather than impose upon it an interpretation drawn from an alien type of religious awareness.

In what follows I shall make use of MacMurray's analysis of the implications of treating the self as a knowing subject and as an intentional agent in my discussion of Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts of the self. I hope that I have made it clear that I do not accept MacMurray's conclusion that the adoption of the standpoint of the self as knowing subject leads to atheism. Atheism it may appear from the Christian's standpoint but not necessarily from any other.

Shankara's 'Theoretical' Standpoint

It may seem strange to characterise a major branch of Hindu philosophy as 'theoretical' and to compare it with a similar 'theoretical' development in Western philosophy when one of the striking differences between Western and Eastern philosophy is the latter's practical outlook. The motive of the latter is to promote the attainment of moksha. P.T. Raju expresses this opposite point of view :

'Western philosophical tradition in general understands the philosopher as a spectator of eternity and all existence. But the standpoint of Indian philosophy, because of its predominantly religious interest, is man's life in its processes, and not merely that of the spectator of these processes. The chief aim of philosophy is not merely a logical understanding of the universe; such an understanding is subservient to the realisation of something higher, which is beyond logic.'[1]

The motivation of Indian philosophy has undoubtedly been religion and the quest for moksha, freedom. It is therefore fair to say, as I have pointed out in Chapter One, that Indian philosophy is practical in its aim whereas Western philosophy is theoretical. Hindu philosophers are motivated by the desire to show that the world is such that moksha is possible. Nevertheless, the answer to this practical question, as far as Shankara is concerned, is that moksha is possible just because man

1 P.T. Raju, Idealist Thought of India, Allen & Unwin, London, 1953, p.149.

is a spectator of the world and not a real participant. He is interested in 'man's life in its processes', not primarily for its own sake, but with the aim of showing that it is compatible with moksha.

Rāmānuja

The majority of Hindus are theists of some sort. Karl Potter says that

'With its emphasis on bhakti and prapatti, this development of Rāmānuja's tradition can be said to represent one of the main arteries through which philosophy reached down to the masses, and it may be said that Viśiṣṭādvaita is today the most powerful philosophy in India in terms of numbers of adherents, whether they know themselves by that label or not.'[1]

By the time of Rāmānuja, non-dualism was firmly established on a philosophic basis and it was possible to rescrutinise it and to modify it without abandonning it. Rāmānuja too is a non-dualist, but he is able to allow for diversity within an essential unity. He reckoned with the non-intelligent by classifying it as part of the body of the supreme spirit and likewise he was able to admit a plurality of independent selves by calling them a part of the one Brahman.

Rāmānuja's Account Of The Self

Superficially there are wide differences between Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts of the nature of the self. Taking into account the common ground which they share, however, it is questionable whether these differences are as great as they first appear.

Rāmānuja holds that there is a multiplicity of individual selves all of which are real, in contrast to Shankara's opinion that there is only one Universal Self whose nature is pure consciousness. Rāmānuja reaches his conclusions by taking his stand on experience. He argues that Shankara's account of the self as pure consciousness can find no basis in experience.

1 Karl Potter, Presuppositions of India's Philosophers, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963, p.252.

Likewise, Shankara's relegation of a personal God to being the effect of māyā, he thinks is a falsification of the nature of religious experience which demands communion with a personal being whose nature is to be free from all evil and filled with auspicious qualities of the highest excellence. Rāmānuja takes the 'given' very seriously. He is not prepared to dispose of apparent contradictions in the 'given' by adopting the kind of arbitrary principle held by Shankara, however successful such a method of interpretation may be. Instead, he sets himself to find an alternative means of harmonising our experience which will not lead as to deny the reality of the empirical world and our lives in it. Where Shankara has proclaimed the ultimate unreality of difference, Rāmānuja emphasises that 'reality is affected with difference.'[1] The highest reality is certainly a unity, but it is not a unity that excludes differences from within it. In fact, any attempt to prove that there is such an undifferenced unity must lead to contradiction for any such proof must have terms and these terms must be different from each other or nothing is proved. This conclusion is supported by an appeal to perception. All perception is of something affected by differences. None of the senses apprehend mere Being, but only Being of a specific kind : 'mere Being does not alone constitute Reality.'[2] Rāmānuja also appeals to scripture and thus shows that none of the accepted means of knowledge, perception, inference or scripture gives us knowledge of non-differenced substance.

Rāmānuja argues for the multiplicity of selves or 'I's' along two different lines. He argues that release would have no appeal if it consisted in the annihilation of the 'I' as there would then be no-one there to enjoy release. In other words, there can be no incentive to

1 Brahma Sūtra, 1.i.1., p.46. 2 Ibid. 1.i.1., p.47.

aim at release if it bears no relationship at all to my present experience. We can have no conception of what would be meant by Shankara's views as he assumes the annihilation of our whole structure of thought which presupposes an 'I'. Something which we cannot even talk of experiencing in some extended sense of the word 'experience' can have no interest for us. The multiplicity of selves with which we are presented in experience must be considered as fundamental.

'What is established by consciousness of the 'I' is the I itself ..... hence to say that the knowing subject, which is established by the state of consciousness, "I know", is the not-I, is no better than to maintain that one's own mother is a barren woman .....'[1]

Rāmānuja's second argument concerns the difficulty of the notion of a consciousness which belongs to no subject, but is simply 'pure' consciousness. We argued that such a conception makes no sense. This is because we cannot have consciousness without a subject who is conscious. Consciousness can be compared to the light, as Shankara suggested. And just as the light is not aware of its own illumination, but illuminates objects for a subject, so consciousness requires the direction of a conscious subject. Rāmānuja has many arguments against the Advaitic account of consciousness in his commentary in the Brahma Sūtras and we shall consider them now.

Being And Consciousness

One reason why Shankara thought that Being and Consciousness were identical was his presupposition that only the unchanging (or only that which is not sublated) can be real. Consciousness, he thought, was the only unchanging entity and since the objects of consciousness were forever changing, they must be ultimately unreal. Rāmānuja points out that this argument is

1 Ibid. 1.i.1., p.58.

fallacious. It neglects to distinguish between persistence and non-persistence on the one hand, and sublation and non-sublation on the other.

The concept of sublation is illustrated by the example of mistaking a shell for a piece of silver. When the error is discovered the perception of the silver is sublated by that of the shell and no longer persists.

The fact that something does not persist, however, does not necessarily mean that it is sublated by something else and therefore unreal. Sublation only occurs when two perceptions are mutually contradictory as are the perceptions of the silver and the shell. But there is nothing contradictory in the fact of jars and pots, etcetera, existing in different places at different times. There is, therefore, no reason for us to suppose that jars and pots and other such empirical objects are unreal. Consciousness, therefore, is not the only thing which is 'unsublated'.

Another essential characteristic of consciousness according to Shankara is its self-manifestation or self-evidence. Consciousness does not require any proof of its existence. It cannot require any proof as it is the presupposition of our knowledge of anything. Our own consciousness, in the moment of knowledge, can never be an object of contemplation. We need consciousness to be aware of objects, but we do not need a second 'consciousness' to be aware of consciousness. Consciousness is svayamprakāsha (self-manifesting). Shankara's school took this to mean that consciousness was at no time an object and that it was this characteristic which distinguished it from all other things which were all the time objects. Rāmānuja points out that this is to take the argument too far. The statement that consciousness is not an object is

true for the knowing self at the time when consciousness is illumining other things, but it is not true at all times. The consciousness of one person may become the object of an act of cognition of another person and likewise past states of consciousness may become the object of present cognition. Rāmānuja says

'The essential nature of consciousness ..... consists therein that it shines forth, or manifests itself, thro' its own being to its own substrate at the present moment; or (to give another definition) it is instrumental in proving its own object by its own being.'[1]

Rāmānuja's arguments are designed to show that consciousness cannot occupy the supreme place assigned to it by Shankara. It cannot be identified with the ultimate reality. He has shown in the first argument that the reasoning which purports to show that only consciousness is real can equally well prove that pots and pans are also real. In the second argument he claims that consciousness, though quite different from pots and pans, can equally well be an object of cognition as can pots and pans. He now goes on to show that the other attributes claimed by Shankara for consciousness are equally invalid and this culminates in the claim that consciousness is an attribute of a permanent conscious self, and in an investigation into the nature of this self. Consciousness is not eternal. Shankara had maintained that as consciousness is self-established it can have no antecedent non-existence and, therefore, no origin. Again Rāmānuja appeals to experience to answer Shankara. The antecedent non-existence of consciousness is apprehended by consciousness itself. We are made aware that our consciousness has a beginning and is not eternal because the objects of consciousness are not eternal. If our consciousness were apprehended as being unlimited in time then any object of consciousness such as a jar would be

1 Ibid. 1.i.1. p.48.

apprehended as eternal and this is not the case. This implies that consciousness can only be understood in terms of objects of consciousness and this Rāmānuja now goes on to argue. There can be no consciousness without an object and one reason for holding this is simply that we never have an experience of this kind. The essential nature of consciousness consists in its illumining objects and the only way that we can prove the self luminosity of consciousness is in regard to this essential attribute. Unless we were aware of consciousness illumining objects we should never be aware of consciousness itself. Shankara, however, did claim that pure consciousness manifests itself at certain times and in particular in deep sleep. This Rāmānuja proceeds to challenge. The fact that we do not remember being conscious in deep sleep is sufficient proof that we are not. What we do remember, as witnessed by our thoughts on awaking, is that 'I was not conscious of anything for a long time'. These last two arguments together imply that consciousness is capable of change. This completes Rāmānuja's analysis of consciousness. Summing up he points out that Shankara's assertion that consciousness is without attributes is incompatible with his denial that it is non-intelligent and so on. It is meaningless to deny consciousness the attribute of non-intelligence unless it is admitted that it has the attribute of intelligence. And if consciousness can be established, as Shankara claims it can, then it must have attributes :

'consciousness is either proved (established) or not. If it is proved it follows that it possesses attributes; if it is not, it is something absolutely nugatory, like a sky-flower.'[1]

Rāmānuja in these arguments has insisted on the experiental basis of consciousness. He discusses next the difference between consciousness and the conscious subject.

1 Ibid. 1.i.1. p.55.

Rāmānuja opens his discussion of the conscious self by taking one of Shankara's slogans : 'consciousness is proof'. This slogan immediately raises the questions, proof of what and to whom? Unless these questions can be answered we cannot say that consciousness is proof since proof is a relative notion depending on the circumstances. Shankara, however, cannot give a satisfactory answer. Consciousness cannot be proof to the Self if consciousness is the Self, and equally it cannot be proof of anything if consciousness is held to be the sole reality. Difference must be allowed to be essential to reality if we are to make any sense of our experience. This leads Rāmānuja to his own definition of consciousness :

'the essential character of consciousness or knowledge is that by its very existence it renders things capable of becoming objects, to its own substrate, of thought and speech. This consciousness (anubhūti) which is also termed jñāna, avagati, samvid, is a particular attribute belonging to a conscious self and related to an object : as such it is known to everyone on the testimony of his own self ..... as appears from ordinary judgements such as "I know the jar".'[1]

In other words, experience demands that we distinguish between the self which knows, that which is known and the means of knowledge and Rāmānuja takes these distinctions to be ultimate. Consciousness is no more and no less than the means by which the self becomes aware of the world. It is the principle attribute of the self.

Having established the difference between consciousness and the conscious subject, Rāmānuja goes on to argue that it is the conscious subject which is permanent rather than consciousness as held by Shankara. The permanence of the subject is proved by the fact of recognition.

'For recognition implies a conscious subject persisting from the earlier to the later moment, and not merely consciousness.'[2]

1 Ibid. 1.i.1. p.56. 2 Ibid. 1.i.1. p.57.

Unless there is a difference between consciousness and the conscious subject it would be impossible to recognise what is seen today as the same as what was seen yesterday. Rāmānuja's appeal to our experience of recognition as proof of the permanence of the conscious subject is reminiscent of Kant's arguments in the Transcendental Deduction for the transcendental unity of apperception. The fact that we are able to recognise that what we think now is the same as what we have thought a moment before is one of the factors which leads Kant to posit the transcendental unity of apperception. But whereas Kant describes this transcendental unity as a 'pure, original unchangeable consciousness'[1] for Rāmānuja it is the knowing subject which has consciousness as its essential attribute. The argument points to there being an underlying synthesizing unity in the changing face of experience, but does it prove a subject of consciousness rather than consciousness and does it prove a permanent subject?

Taking the last question first it is clear that the argument cannot establish the permanence of a subject in the sense of a subject which has no beginning or end. It can only establish the permanence of a subject so long as consciousness is an attribute of the subject. If there is no consciousness there can be no recognition and consequently no awareness of the subject who recognises. It is not clear, however, whether Rāmānuja intended to prove the permanency of the conscious subject in this sense by means of this argument, although he certainly held it as a tenet of belief on other grounds : the self, as a part of God, has all the attributes of God, including eternity. Rāmānuja's main concern in this argument appears to be to distinguish between consciousness and the subject who is conscious, arguing that while the

1 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, Kemp Smith translation, p.136.

former is changing, the latter must, in contrast, be assumed to be permanent, otherwise there could be no unity of experience.

This leads us to the second question. Does the argument in fact prove the existence of a conscious subject rather than consciousness?

Kant, as we have noted, takes the fact of recognition to prove the existence of an unchanging consciousness, Rāmānuja takes it to prove a conscious subject. It is arguable that Kant was not concerned with this specific distinction so that his use of the term 'consciousness' is not decisive. Kant was writing within philosophic tradition which took for granted the multiplicity of knowing subjects and his task was simply to show what the nature of a knowing subject was in order that knowledge should be possible. At this stage he was concerned not to prejudice his final account of the self and in this context, therefore, the term 'consciousness' is not definitive, the more important terms being 'synthetic' and 'unity'. Taking into account Rāmānuja's previous arguments which purport to show that consciousness is not continuous in experience, it must be admitted that experience has to have a unity and if the unity is not provided by a continuous awareness (is this the constant impression which Hume failed to find which Shankara thinks is provided by consciousness?) it is not unreasonable to suppose that it is achieved by the person whose awareness it is.

Rāmānuja also attacks Shankara's view that a mutual superimposition takes place between the interior self (pratyagātman) and the internal organ. The result of this superimposition, as we have seen, is held to be that the ātman presents itself in our ordinary experience as the ahamkāra, i.e. we falsely imagine that we are knowing subjects when in fact the only reality is pure consciousness without a subject. To this Rāmānuja

Replies that if this were the case then

'the conscious "I" would be cognised as co-ordinate with the state of consciousness, "I am consciousness", just as the shining thing presenting itself to our eyes is judged to be silver.'[1]

This is not the case however. The shining thing is seen to be silver but the state of consciousness, 'I am consciousness' is not seen to be the 'I' but only an attribute of the 'I'. There is far more to the 'I' than the judgement 'I am consciousness' : what the judgement reveals is an 'I' which is distinguished by consciousness.

The Conscious Subject in Deep Sleep and in the State of Release

Again Rāmānuja appeals to our experience and to the natural expression of that experience. On waking we may think 'I slept well' but never 'I was pure consciousness'. During sleep consciousness does not persist but the knowing subject does, from our own judgement we can tell that during sleep it was perceptive of pleasure; for the term 'well' refers to the past sleep and not to the present awakening. Next Rāmānuja considers the meaning of 'For such and such a time I was conscious of nothing' and the expression 'I was not conscious of myself'. The first expression is not intended to be a negation of all experience but only of our experience of the objects of knowledge. The words 'I was conscious' show that the knowing 'I' persisted otherwise we should be unable to make a judgement at all. In the expression 'I was not conscious of myself'. The 'myself' is not the same as the 'I'. Rāmānuja says

1 Ibid. 1.i.1. p. 61

'The object of the (one) myself is the "I" distinguished by class characteristics as it presents itself in the waking state; the object of the word "I" (in the judgement) is that "I" which consists of a uniform flow of self-consciousness which persists in deep sleep also, but is there not quite distinct.' 1

In his consideration of final release Rāmānuja reaffirms the ultimacy of the 'I'. To maintain that consciousness of the 'I' does not persist in the state of final release amounts to the doctrine that release is the annihilation of the self. He states :

'The "I" is not a mere attribute of the Self so that even after its destruction the essential nature of the Self might persist ..... but it constitutes the very nature of the Self.'[2]

Again he refers to the nature of judgements such as 'I know' in confirmation of his views. These judgements show that we are conscious of knowledge as a mere attribute of the self.

1 Ibid 1.i.1 p.69 2 Ibid 1.i.1. p. 70

The Relation Of The Self To The Body And The World

It is time now to look more closely at Rāmānuja's account of the relation of the self to the body and to the world. This is best done by considering first the relation of God and the self, for the self's relation to the world is a model of God's relation to the self.

For Rāmānuja the soul is a part of God. As a part of God the soul is fundamentally equal to God in that it has the same qualities as has God :

'the released individual soul when reaching the highest light, i.e. Brahman, which is free from all sin and so on, attains its true nature which is characterised by similar freedom from sin and so on .....'[1]

He also asserts that the individual soul possesses the same twofold attributes as Brahman, viz. freedom from evil and possession of blessed qualities,[2] with the exception of God's 'world-ruling energies'.[3]

The souls together with all non-sentient beings make up God's body. They may exist in an unevolved subtle state or in an evolved causal state. The relationship is described thus :

'The highest Self ..... has for its body all sentient and non-sentient beings - instruments of sport for him as it were - in so subtle a form that they may be called non-existing : and as they are his body he may be said to consist of them (tan-māyā). Then desirous of providing himself with an infinity of play things of all kinds he, by a series of steps ..... so modifies himself ..... and thus appears in the form of our world containing what the text denotes as sat and tyat, i.e. all intelligent and non-intelligent things, from gods down to plants and stones.'[4]

(The motive of play as we have already noted is a reference to the self-sufficiency of God. Since God has everything he is perfectly self-

1 Ibid. 1.iii.19. p.323 2 Ibid. 3.ii.12. p.608. 3 Ibid. 4.iv.1. p.769. 4 Ibid.1.iv.27. p.405.

sufficient and can have no need of the world. His only motive, therefore in creating it can be play or sport. This is comparable to the motive for creation as described in the Timaeus.) As God is the conscious directing agent of the world which is his body so the soul is the conscious directing agent of its body. This means that the body and the world are ultimately real for Rāmānuja as they are not for Shankara. Consequently, the empirical world must be taken seriously since the self is an agent in it. Rāmānuja devotes some space to showing that the individual self is an agent and not the internal organ as held by Shankara. He argues that scripture can only be meaningful if the self is assumed to be an agent since one of the main purposes of scripture is the injunction of various actions which lead to release.[1] Shankara had argued that activity did not originate with the self but with the non-intelligent pradhāna or prakṛti in the form of the internal organ. Rāmānuja replies that if Shankara's hypotheses were correct then the effect of any action of an individual self would be experienced by each of the other selves. This is because all souls are equally involved with prakṛti and furthermore, because in Shankara's views the self is omnipresent and therefore is in equal proximity to each part of prakrti. This is clearly not the case so that it is more reasonable to assume that it is the individual self which carries out and enjoys its own actions using as its instrument the internal organ. Similarly if each soul is omnipresent we cannot explain the different distinctions of the effects of actions on the different souls for no soul can be exclusively connected with any particular internal organ. Rāmānuja's arguments here remind one of Leibniz's suggestion that the essence of personality is responsibility. Once the individual's responsibility for the execution and consequences of his actions is broken down then the notion of a person has lost its

1 Ibid. 2.iii.33. p. 553 ff.

definitive content. Rāmānuja is pointing out that the concept of action is only meaningful in terms of a multiplicity of independent selves. Further Rāmānuja points out that if the internal organ was the agent then the power of enjoyment would also belong to the internal organ and be denied of the self. But this is contrary to one of Shankara's proofs of the self which is said to be pure bliss. Bliss can only be attributed to a knowing agent. Finally Rāmānuja points out that although the self is an agent it does not act all the time. It requires to have particular reasons for acting since its chief attribute is intelligence and an intelligent being does not act blindly. The self is like a carpenter with his tools.[1] When he is not using them he is no less a carpenter. Likewise the self acts or not as he pleases. This is one more proof that action springs from the intelligent self. If the internal organ were essentially active it would be constantly acting, since as it is a non-intelligent being it could not be influenced by particular reasons for acting.

Comparing Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts of the self we can see that for both the essential differentia of the personal is cit, which we have compared with rationality in the Western tradition. In other words, the clue to our understanding of the form of human experience is cit. Their interpretation of the meaning of cit, however, varies widely. For Shankara consciousness is ultimately identical with being or reality. It transcends the quality of subject and object and ultimately comes to refer to something 'behind' the phenomena. This leads to the view that the true self is the 'witness' self, the same for everyone unconcerned with the particularities of the individual. This self cannot be an agent for this would imply his participation in the changing, unreal world of māyā. He can only know this world as an

1 Ibid. 2.iii.38. p.556.

object of contemplation. Consequently he can have no direct interest in changing it or in getting to know his fellow men since as individual selves they are ultimately unreal, and as far as they are real they are identical with himself in any case. (This does not preclude an indirect interest in the world and others as a means of furthering one's salvation.) We have compared this view with John MacMurray's characterisation of the self as thinker and found great similarity. MacMurray argues that to start from the standpoint of the thinking self is ultimately to end up with solipsism and we have seen that Shankara's position in this respect is more logical than that of the general run of Western philosophy in that the multiplicity of individual selves is abolished.

In Rāmānuja's case the self is not identical with cit but cit is its distinguishing attribute. The knowing 'I' is ultimate and the individual selves real. The knowing subject is in no sense an impression accompanying our experience : it is rather a necessary presupposition of experience. But although it itself is not a part of the empirical world it is anchored firmly to the empirical world in a way that Shankara's pure consciousness is not. This is because it has as its chief attribute consciousness, but not an empty consciousness. Rāmānuja's consciousness is a consciousness of the world which both reveals the self and is given meaning by the self.

The Unity Of Consciousness

The term 'consciousness' refers to the awareness which a person has of his thoughts and actions and of his perceptions in general. This is what is meant by the illuminative nature of consciousness. But although we are aware that we are conscious we are not aware of this in the same way that we are aware of the objects of which we are conscious. This is

indicated by saying that consciousness is self-illuminating. Kant in the passage referred to earlier uses the term 'apprehension' interchangeably with 'consciousness' and this reminds us that having said that it is by means of our consciousness that we are aware of things, we have still not explained consciousness. Is it active or passive? The term 'apprehension' suggests activity whereas 'consciousness' suggests the passive reception of impressions. Rāmānuja, in distinguishing the conscious subject from consciousness is distinguishing an active and a passive element in our apprehension of experience. The traditional metaphor used to describe consciousness is that of light : it illumines objects. But if that is the agreed function of consciousness it is not enough to explain experience. It is of little use for objects to be illuminated unless there be a subject for whom they are illuminated and who is able to recognise them for what they are. So Rāmānuja brings back the conscious subject as the active synthesizing unity of experience. Consciousness is the chief attribute of the subject, yes, for without consciousness experience would have no raw material, but it is significant that for Rāmānuja, the subject is also an <u>agent</u>. This implies that he is able to grasp and manipulate experience.

Experience must have a unity : this is axiomatic. Any account of the self or person must give some explanation of this unity. It must try to explain what sort of unity it is and how it is achieved. Shankara's answer is that the unity is provided by consciousness. To use Humean language, consciousness is a constant impression which accompanies all our experiences and gives them a unity. If we are not always aware of this constant impression this is because we are blinded by ignorance, deluded by māyā. We have confused something else, for example our body or our mind, with our real self, consciousness. Rāmānuja's reply is that we can find no such constant impression. Consciousness fluctuates and is

sometimes absent and cannot, therefore, provide the unity that is required. The unity of experience is not 'given' by consciousness, but is created by a permanent conscious subject who has the ability to synthesize successive experiences and make sense of them.

This has important consequences. If pure consciousness is the essence of the personal then it must be assumed to be the same impression in each individual self. From this it follows that the empirical selves are not ultimately real and that the true self of each person is the universal self, consciousness. But if the unity of experience for each person is created by a permanent, conscious subject who synthesizes the experience then the different experiences synthesized are vital to the unity of the person. In other words, the unity cannot be understood apart from the experiences. This safeguards the uniqueness of the individual and makes necessary the suppositions of a multiplicity of unique selves, each of which has his uniqueness guaranteed by the different combinations of experiences synthesized within his personal life. What then, in Rāmānuja's interpretation, is referred to by the term 'I'? The 'I' does not refer to my body or to my mind, or to any particular experience of myself or group of such experiences; it does not refer to an attributeless consciousness which accompanies all my experiences though I may not always be aware of it, as I sometimes may forget that I have toothache though the tooth continues to pain me; the 'I' refers to the unique combination and synthesis of the total experiences which make up my life. 'I' as the permanent, conscious subject cannot be apprehended apart from the experiences which indicate my existence : these experiences make no sense apart from my apprehension of them. So Rāmānuja can say that if release consisted in the annihilation of the 'I' it would hold no attractions. If we were to forget all our experiences up to the present, if they

were to cease to make sense to us, then the 'I' would be annihilated. Any goal which is proposed for human life if it is to make sense must include this 'I' which is the total fabric of my personal life. This does not imply that any particular part of my life is necessary in order that I should be myself. For example, 'I' includes my body at the present time but it does not necessarily include any particular part of my body. I can lose my hand or my foot and still be 'me'. The deprivation of a limb is still a part of the whole of any experience and my experience continues without the limb.

Conclusions

In this Chapter the emphasis has been on a detailed study of Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts of the self and in particular their accounts of consciousness, the principle attribute of the self, or in Shankara's case, the essence of the self. Consciousness may be regarded as the differentia of the personal for Shankara and Rāmānuja in the same way as the rational may be regarded as the differentia of the personal for Western thinkers. There are important similarities in the two conceptions. In both cases we can have no doubt as to the area of experience to which they refer; at the same time, there is a certain 'open-endedness' about them both - they cover a wide range of experience, and they may be interpreted in a variety of different ways by writers of different persuasions. It is interesting that two such different traditions should have hit on the same type of concept - thought, intelligence, self-awareness - to mark what they consider the distinctive element in man.

As the account given of the self depends in large parts on the nature of the religious apprehension in which the self participates we considered in the previous Chapter the conception of Brahman. This

revealed two main strands in Hindu religious thought, the monistic and the theistic and we find now in the present Chapter that the monistic account of Brahman as the undifferentiated One, above speech and mind, is reflected in an account of the ātman as pure consciousness, a self who witnesses the world but takes no active part in it. On the other hand, the theistic account of Brahman goes along with the assertion that the self is an agent of whom consciousness ~~and intelligence~~ is the principle attribute. One thing that stands out in comparing these different views of the self and Brahman is that the theistic account is able to account for both thought and action whereas the monistic account, in insisting on the supremacy and ultimacy of thought is not able to give any satisfactory account of action but must instead look on the world of action as an object of contemplation. In spite of this apparent advantage of the theistic account, the general tendency in Hindu thought has been to subsume theism within the general framework of monism. This as we saw in the previous Chapter could be accounted for in terms of both logic and practice. Monism has the great theoretical advantage in maintaining the unity of experience and in the religious situation in India with its multiplcity of gods and goddesses the notion of a supreme personal Being is much harder to entertain on the philosophical level.

One point to be noted in both Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts is the rigorous logic with which they follow their arguments to their conclusion. It is important when criticizing these arguments to be aware of the assumptions which each writer takes as axiomatic otherwise we are in danger of missing the point. These assumptions are rooted in the nature of the religious experience which each takes as real. In Shankara's case it is the experience of identity with the one without a second and, therefore, he has no reason, in the light of this, to maintain the

ultimate reality of the individual selves. Consequently in adopting a similar standpoint to that of Descartes as a starting point he cannot be criticized on the grounds of solipsism. His position is a type of solipsism. In Rāmānuja's case, his experience of a personal God does require him to maintain the individuality of the separate selves. The only way to do this is to make them primarily agents for as far as they are or possess consciousness, they must all be regarded as identical. The thing that differentiates one self from another is their different interactions with the world.

The main point at issue between them, apart from their differing religious apprehensions, is a difference in the significance which they attach to action. For Rāmānuja action is to be taken seriously as it is of the essential nature of the self whereas for Shankara action is only real on the empirical plane. In coming to any decision on the merits of each point of view, then, it is necessary to take into account the total attitude to life and experience involved as well as the nature of the religious experiences from which these attitudes originate. As we saw in the previous Chapter, a metaphysics such as Shankara's which takes pure thought as its starting point has a basic problem in accounting for the existence of the empirical world, and it completely fails to do this as the premisses from which it starts, that of a completely self-sufficient being, exclude the possibility of an empirical world. In this Chapter, we have seen that a similar premiss regarding the nature of the self, i.e. that it is pure consciousness, the 'I think', also precludes the possibility of dealing with the empirical world as any more than a possibly illusory object of thought. Apart from questions regarding the significance of action the other basic question which must be raised with Shankara's account is whether it is really possible to make sense of the notion of 'pure consciousness' in

out of relation to any possible content of consciousness, and that of the 'witness-self' which again cannot rely on the body for spatial location and, therefore, faces the question of what it can witness and from where. It may be that in the moral sphere the notion of an unmoved witness-self has great value, but the difficulty in expressing it in a coherent analysis remains.

Turning to Rāmānuja, we suggested in the previous Chapter that his metaphysics was more able to give a satisfactory account of the existence of the empirical world than was that of Shankara. By treating the world as the body and instrument of God, Rāmānuja thereby maintained its value and significance and at the same time gave it a relative independence. This same line of thought is continued in his account of the self as a conscious agent. In maintaining that the self is an acting subject whose chief attribute is consciousness he thereby insists on the reality of individual selves. He implies that our apprehension of ourselves is as bodily agents who act and interact with the world around us with self-awareness. This in turn implies that we possess a certain freedom and that we are responsible for our actions in a sense that could not be possible on the basis of Shankara's metaphysics, viz. that the empirical world is an illusory object of our thought. This leads us into the theme of the next Chapter which is concerned with the ethical implications of these differing accounts of Brahman and the self. It must be remembered that Shankara and Rāmānuja were not primarily concerned with drawing these ethical implications which were only made explicit by their later followers : they, themselves, were only concerned to give a correct account of our experience as they saw it which would show that the nature of the world is such that moksha is possible. Nevertheless the ethical implications are obviously of great importance. A conception of the personal implies the adoption of a

certain way of life, and the consequences and therefore possibility of a given way of life have an important bearing on the conception of the personal which they reflect.

Note One On Chapter Three

Ātman And Brahman

Ninian Smart discusses the Ātman/Brahman identification in his book 'Reasons and Faiths'.[1] He identifies various 'strands' in religious thought, i.e. directions in which it may develop, amongst which are the Numinous and the Mystical. He argues that in the Ātman/Brahman identification these two strands become woven together.

'The identification of Brahman with the Ātman serves ..... as a prominent example of the kind of weaving together of different strands of discourse in a doctrinal scheme.'[2]

Because of similarities in the characteristics attributed to the Ātman and to Brahman the two have become identified in spite of initial divergence. Brahman is what is ultimately apprehended in the Numinous approach which seeks the reality behind external phenomena, whereas the Ātman is apprehended in the Mystical approach which looks for the inner reality of the self. Smart illustrates his point by comparing the characteristics of nirvana, the ultimate goal of mystical experience with those of Brahman. He finds three main similarities[3]: in the formal characteristics of mystical experience, in the type of doctrine associated with mysticism, and in certain of the consequences of mystical attainment. Firstly, nirvana is timeless, imperceptible and transcendent and these terms also apply to Brahman. Secondly, in both doctrines we have a picture of the real lying outside phenomena. In the Brahman doctrine, Brahman is the real which is behind the changing empirical scene whereas in the Ātman doctrine the Ātman is the real which is behind the empirical self. Thirdly, Smart links the moral consequences of the pursuit of the mystical ideal and the worship of Brahman. The mystic's experience of the divine results in

1 Ninian Smart, Reasons And Faiths, London, R. & K. Paul, 1958, Ch.3.
2 Op. Cit. p.107. 3 Ibid. p.82.

a purity of character which is parallelled with the conception of God as freeing from sin.

This last comparison may be questioned. The aim of the non-theistic mystic is freedom from ignorance rather than from sin. Certainly, as Smart asserts the mystic's path involves abnegation and this has affinities with the self-abasement of the worshipper. But there is an essential difference between the worshipper and the mystic in that in a non-theistic type of mysticism such as is found in the Vedānta, the self-abnegation of the mystic is more akin to that of the scholar before knowledge than to the worshipper in the presence of a superior moral being.

Note Two On Chapter Three

The Implications For Morality Of MacMurray's Analyses

In 'Persons in Relation'[1] the sequel to 'The Self as Agent', MacMurray discusses the place of morality in the life of the agent. The application of his analysis to Shankara's thought is illuminating. If we start by regarding the self as primarily a thinking subject then the world as we have seen becomes an object of contemplation for this subject. Included in the world are the person's actions and these, too, become less real than the life of thought. MacMurray illustrates the genesis of this attitude in the case of the relationship between mother and child. He argues that there inevitably comes a time when the bond between mother and child is disrupted because the mother wishes the child to do for himself something which she has up till that time done for him. The child then has three alternatives. He can accept the mother's decision and advance to a more mature relationship with her, or he can reject it. If he rejects it he still has to

1 John MacMurray, Persons in Relation, Faber & Faber, 1961.

achieve some sort of existence. This may be done by adopting either a submissive or an aggressive attitude. The submissive child does what his mother tells him and is a 'good' boy as far as appearances go : but from his point of view he is by his good behaviour merely placating his mother and his real life no longer consists in the actions which he does for her but in the fantasies of his imagination. It is this attitude which MacMurray sees as giving rise to a contemplative morality. The motive behind this attitude is fear of the other. The aggressive child, on the other hand, seeks to impose his will on his mother and tries to gain his ends by force. His real life is the practical life but it is a life of aggression in which other people are used as means to his own ends. Here the motive of fear has given place to hatred. The moral corollary of this is 'Might is Right' and the pursuit of power for its own sake. MacMurray describes these two attitudes as 'ambivalent forms of negative or egocentric behaviour'.[1] He says

'They have the same motive and the same ultimate objective - fear for oneself in relation to the other, and the defence of oneself against the threat from the other.'[2]

Both attitudes involve unreality. The interesting thing about these attitudes is that they both spring from a refusal to participate in the mutuality of personal relationships and they both lead to egocentricity or a type of solipsism. In the submissive attitude the world becomes something to be endured and I am the only person who is allowed to be of any interest. From my point of view, other selves do not exist, for I cannot admit them as independent agents interacting with me. Likewise, with the aggressive attitude I am the only one that matters because I cannot allow that other people may impose their wills on me. For all practical purposes I must regard myself as the only one in the world.

1 Op. Cit. p.104. 2 Ibid. p.104.

I agree with the general lines of MacMurray's analysis but not with the details. From my own experience it seems unlikely that the rupture in the mother and child relationship should occur in the way described. I accept that there exists such a tension between the child's wishes and the demands of the 'Other', in this case his mother, and that this tension, when satisfactorily resolved leads to a greater maturity in personal relationships, and further, that this instance gives a general pattern of human relationship and personal existence. However, MacMurray's account suggests that it is the mother who forces the unwilling child to develop. I do not believe that this is ever the case unless the mother has first discouraged and prevented the child from following his natural interests. What in fact happens is that in pursuit of his natural interests the child inevitably encounters certain obstacles to the fulfilment of his desires in the person of his mother who for his own good forbids certain activities. It is his reaction to this situation which leads to the attitudes MacMurray describes.

The moralities inspired by these attitudes are remarkably exemplified in the implications of Shankara's Advaitism as found in Hindu life. In the contemplative mode of morality a person

'can solve the problem of living in a world which appears dangerous by withdrawing into reflection, and adopting the attitude of a spectator.'[1]

We have already seen that one of Shankara's ideals is that of the impartial spectator, the 'witness-self'. But this spectator self cannot completely withdraw into the realm of reflection. He still has to live in the practical world and find a means to adapt himself to it. What happens, if we adopt an analysis on MacMurray's lines is that for him the practical life becomes 'a means to the inner life of the mind.'[2]

1 Ibid. p.123. 2 Ibid. p.124.

This can be the case if 'the practical life can be made automatic, a matter of routine and habit.[1] In this type of society there is 'a system of social habit, in which the activity of each member is functionally related to the activity of the others, so that the practical life of the society is a balanced and harmonious unity ..... To maintain this each member must have his function in the common life.'[2]

The morality which arises in this type of society is a morality of good form. The right action is the 'fitting' action and the criterion of fitness is aesthetic in that it depends on a vision of the good for all. (Contrast the attitude of 'let justice be done though the heavens fall'.)

MacMurray's description of the contemplative morality, whose classical exposition he finds in Plato's Republic, might well have been intended to fit the morality of the traditional Hindu way of life. There is the caste system, the ramifications of which do not concern us, but which in its essentials is intended to divide society into four different classes according to the intrinsic qualities of the members of society and thereby to lay down the duties which are incumbent on each member. There is also the ideal of the four stages of life which each man is visualised as passing through, scholar, householder, forest-dweller and wandering sage. Each stage has its appropriate behaviour.

Thus in Shankara's thought we start with the subject, the self as thinker and flowing from this we have the morality of good form, the right action being the one which is most fitting.

1 Ibid. p. 124. 2 Ibid. p.124.

There is yet another application of MacMurray's thesis. As we have seen, he depicts two negative modes of morality, one in which the contemplative attitude is adopted and the other in which the aggressive attitude is adopted. When the aggressive attitude is adopted then the goal becomes 'the appropriation of power'. MacMurray shows how this type of morality is evident in the type of society depicted by Hobbes where the original state of man is pictured as being that of every man for himself. There is another interpretation of the urge to appropriate power, however, which is more relevant to Hindu ideals. The aim of the Yogin is moksha, but this is obtained by an extension of the yogin's power over himself and nature. It is no accident that the practice of yoga is said to result in the attainment of wonderful powers over the natural elements as well as in mental control, and it is as a result of this power that the teacher of yoga, the guru, is held in such esteem. Karl H. Potter says that

'the ultimate value recognised by classical Hinduism in its most sophisticated sources is not morality but freedom, not rational self-control in the interests of the community's welfare, but complete control over one's environment - something which includes self-control but also includes control of others and even control of the physical sources of power in the universe.'[1]

This idea is not confined to classical Hinduism but comes out clearly in the writings of the modern Hindu, Aurobindo, whose ideal is that of the 'Superman', the man of self-control and power, who has achieved complete self-realisation.

'A gnostic being will possess not only a truth-conscious control of the realised spirit's power over its physical world, but also the full power of the mental and vital planes and the use of their greater forces for

1 Karl H. Potter, Presuppositions of India's Philosophies, p.3.

the perfection of the physical existence. This greater knowledge and wider hold of all existence will enormously increase the power of instrumentation of the gnostic being on his surroundings and on the world of physical Nature.'[1]

(There is, of course, more to the 'Superman' than this.) Other writers echo the same thought. For example, P.T. Raju says that

'almost all contemporary writers stress freedom by conquest and assimilation.'[2]

I have argued that Shankara's standpoint is that of the 'I think' and that, in accordance with MacMurray's analysis, the type of morality which issues from this standpoint is that where the supreme value is either good form or the pursuit of power. Both these developments are amply exemplified in Hindu ideals and the structure of Hindu society. In this way, Shankara's philosophy provides a metaphysical basis for Hindu ideals and values.

1 Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Arya Publishing House, 1940, p.870.

2 P.T. Raju, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p.440.

CHAPTER FOUR - DHARMA AND MOKSHA

Introduction And Recapitulation

Two main considerations have stimulated this study of the conception of the personal in Hindu and Christian thought. In the first place, conflicting assumptions regarding the nature of religious experience frequently underlie the writings of both Hindu and Christian authors. Christian writers generally view genuine religious experience as a type of personal encounter. Many Hindu writers, on the other hand, see religious experience in terms of the realisation of one's identity with the ultimate reality and relegate any element of personal encounter to a subsidiary place in the scheme of things. The basic disagreement to which attention has been drawn in the preceding Chapters is between a position which regards the highest values as being generated in and through personal encounter and a position where the significance of such encounter and the values generated by it are a matter for debate. The second consideration prompting the present study has been contemporary Hindu discussion of social issues. Life and philosophy have always been regarded as part and parcel of each other in the Hindu tradition however disparate the elements encompassed by each might appear. Philosophy was intended to have a practical outcome and the ultimate aims of life were clarified and understood in terms of philosophic thought. Now the traditional structure of Hindu society has either broken down or is in the process of change and the question arises of justifying what appears as a new social ethic in terms of the traditional metaphysics so as to preserve the continuity of Hinduism. One of the ways in which this issue has been raised has been the use of Shankara's monistic metaphysics to justify a this-worldly attitude to life and morality rather than the traditional other-worldly attitude.

These two considerations are interlinked in that both concern the basis and significance of personal values. I have endeavoured in the preceding chapters to throw some light on the matter by examining the way that different 'personal' and 'impersonal' elements enter into two of the 'key' concepts of Hindu thought : Brahman and Ātman.

The Ambivalence In Christian Thought

In the first chapter we distinguished two strands in the Christian account of the personal, that in which a person is thought of as 'an independent and fundamentally unchangeable individual' and that in which the main thought is of 'social relationships and voluntary activity'. The former strand stems from Greek influence, the latter from Hebrew. The presence of these two strands in the Christian tradition points to the fact that even there, where the importance of relationship is central, there is a certain ambivalence, which parallels the even greater ambivalence in Hindu thought between pure consciousness and the conscious agent.

Since it is persons who experience the world any account of the world must also imply an account of the nature of the personal. That the personal is central in experience is indubitable : what it is is a matter for debate. In Christianity we have seen that the central reality and value is grounded in personal relationship with the corollary that love is the beginning and end of Christian ethics. This is the central thought of Christianity that is reflected in the account of a person as a being capable of voluntary activity and social relationship. On the other hand, Greek philosophical influence intervened. That which involved itself in activity could not be changeless and that which experienced change could not be

perfect. If God were to be regarded as in some sense a person then He could not be regarded as active, but must be fundamentally unchangeable. Likewise, that which expressed and found its nature in social relationship must require something other than itself in order to exist, and, therefore, could not be self-sufficient and if not self-sufficient, must be less than perfect. God, therefore, if personhood or personality were to be ascribed to Him in any way, must be recognised to be fully independent from any other creature and in no need of any assistance from them in order to express His nature. Hence we get two diametrically opposed accounts of the personal in Christian thought. The opposition was not openly recognised and, in fact, the Hebrew strand was never given proper philosophical expression. As we saw in Chapter Two, however, a metaphysics which has for its central conception an immutable, self-sufficient being, is faced with the problem of accounting for existence of the empirical world. This was done by supposing that out of the fulness of the Divine being the world necessarily evolved as an expression of His perfection. This became in the Middle Ages the philosophical expression of the doctrine of Divine love, though that love was interpreted in a way which saw little resemblance to the ordinary meaning of the term. In Medieval thought the notions of God's 'love' and 'goodness' frequently mean

'Not compassion, not the alleviation of human suffering, but the immeasurable and inexhaustible prodigious energy, the fecundity of an Absolute not conceived as truly possessing emotions similar to man's. God's love ..... in one consists primarily rather in the creative or generative than in the redemptive or providential office of Deity.'[1]

Through the interplay of the notions of being and becoming the

1 A.O.Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, Havard University Press, 1936, P. 67.

Christian God, as Lovejoy points out, became two-gods-in-one. The notion of the creative fulness of God can be seen as an attempt to give expression to the conception of God as an active being who enters into relationship with the world. This is not satisfactory, however. The doctrine of love is not adequately represented by an account of this 'immeasurable and inexhaustible prodigious energy' and further, the fact that this energy must be conceived as the necessary expression of the nature of the Deity is in contradiction to the voluntariness which is an essential characteristic of personal relationship.

The philosophical account of a person as 'an independent and fundamentally unchangeable individual' is, on the face of it, completely opposed to our ordinary ideas as to what constitutes a person. It was necessitated, however, by the need to conform in letter, at least, to the accepted assumption that God was personal in nature, while yet providing an account of Him which would satisfy the philosophical conscience. We have seen that with very little change it might very well equally be applied to Shankara's nirguna Brahman. This leads to the conclusion that if Shankara's nirguna Brahman is to be termed impersonal, then equally, one Christian account of the personal which is intended to make the concept of person applicable to God, may also be termed 'impersonal'; and we get a dichotomy in Christianity, parallel to that in Hinduism, between the position which takes a personal God, in the ordinary sense of personal, as ultimate and the values generated by such a God as fundamental and the position where merely personal values and being must be transcended in order adequately to talk about or experience God. The crux of the difficulty for the Christian philosopher is that while the nature of Christian experience demands that God be regarded as personal in the sense that

He acts and loves and desires to enter into a personal relationship with man, yet from the philosophical point of view, such an account appears to do less than justice to God's nature and, in fact, to represent Him as necessarily less than perfect. If action is to be meaningfully predicated of God then this implies some change in His being and also that there is an 'other' to give context and meaning to His actions.

It may be argued that the problem of the relation between the world and God, between finite things and the infinite divine reality, is ultimately insoluble theoretically and can only be lived through practically in the experience of loving relationship with God and with one's fellow men. This view has been expressed by F.C. Copleston.[1] Copleston interprets Hegel theistically. Other interpretations are, of course, possible.

Copleston thinks that Hegel, in attempting to express the truths of religion in philosophical terms, attempted 'to do what cannot be done, namely, to make plain to view what can only be simply apprehended through the use of analogies and symbols'.[2] Certainly, Hegel's philosophy is one of the most sustained efforts to represent the identity-in-difference of the relation between God and man without either assimilating man to God or reducing God to man. On the other hand, Hegel's philosophy may be viewed as the culmination of the tradition of two-gods-in-one to which we have already referred and the conclusion to be drawn from his failure to represent the relation between the empirical world and the Divine

1 Hegel and the Rationalisation of Mysticism, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, 1967-68, Vol. 2, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1969.

2 Op. Cit. p.132.

reality satisfactorily may be that his fundamental assumption and starting point was wrong. The assumption that 'the Absolute must be defined as self-thinking thought'[1] with what we have seen to be the correlative notion that 'it must also be conceived as a dynamic process of self-actualisation'[2] is simply a restatement of Plato and we have argued in previous Chapters that such assumptions cannot lead to a satisfactory account of empirical life.

Philosophy must take a new direction. We have argued, in agreement with MacMurray, that the new standpoint will take agency as its central concept. This is in line with our actual experience of the world which is primarily practical. Thought is for the sake of action and imaginative thought which does not issue in action is parasitic on practical thought which aims to change the world in some way. Even imaginative thought which may not directly affect the world, does so indirectly by its effect on the minds of those who contemplate it. Copleston's suggestion that the problem of the relation between God and the world admits of no theoretical solution, but can only be lived through in the experience of love is in line with this approach. Loving is primarily an activity which includes thought as a constituent.

This answer, however, does not go far enough. It may be that the correct approach to these fundamental problems is through active commitment to a way of life rather than passive theorising, yet this does not preclude the philosopher from offering a conceptual analysis of the activity in question.

1 Op.Cit.P.126

2 Op.Cit.P.126

We must reject Copleston's view that the truths of religion cannot be adequately expressed in philosophical terms, but only through the use of symbol and analogy. Philosophical analysis of religion must tally with religious experience itself. If it does not, then one or other must be shown to be mistaken. I have suggested that the mistake has been made by philosophy. Philosophers have been unwilling to start with the experience of personal interaction which involves thought as a constituent, but have substituted instead the apparent absoluteness of 'self-thinking thought'. It is not surprising that 'self-thinking thought' cannot account for the mutability of the world and its relation to the infinite Divine. Thought itself can only be an abstraction from a totality of action and may be regarded as immutable simply because it is an abstraction and not the concrete actuality. 'Self-thinking thought' is an even greater abstraction so far as the notion can be understood. In our experience thoughts do not think themselves, but it is persons who think and they think as a part of their concrete actuality. The expression 'only a thought' betrays the insubstantiality of thought itself. However deep and wonderful our thoughts, until they are given expression in some form they remain insignificant. Once we realise the abstract nature of thought we see that to think of the Absolute as pure thought is just as deficient an account of the Absolute as the 'personal' account it is intended to replace and this suggests that philosophy has yet to get to grips with an adequate account of the personal.

Ambivalence in Hindu Thought

The problem of the relationship between God and the world as raised by the religious need to think of Him in personal terms and the philosophical conviction that such an account is not adequate to the

expression of the Divine perfection is found also in Hindu thought. Here the difficulty is simplified by the principle of 'ishta devata', i.e. the freedom to worship the God of one's choice. As we have already noted, a multiplicity of Divinities has always been a feature of Hinduism and the important thing is the worship rather than the worship of any particular God. This has made it much easier to find the unity which philosophy demanded in a principle that was not personal as the Gods were. The philosophical difficulties, however, were the same. Action necessarily spelt change and the necessity of an 'other' and hence imperfection. Radhakrishnan has summed up the problem admirably. He says: 'if the being is a positive activity, this activity has meaning only when it is opposed or limited by conditions which are not created by itself. Whether or not the contrast between self and not-self is essential to personality, human or Divine, life of a personal being is not possible except in relation to an environment. If God has no environment on which He acts, He cannot be personal. If God is personal, He cannot be the Absolute, which has nothing which is not included in it in every possible sense of the word. . . . . .'

'The personality of God is possible only with reference to a world with its imperfections and capability for progress. In other words, the being of a personal God is dependent on the existence of created order. God depends on creation even as creation depends on God.'[1]

In both traditions there is a conflict and tension between the demands of religious experience and those of the philosophical mind. We have already argued in Chapter Two that it is impossible to keep these apart. The ultimate objects of religious experience and philosophical analysis must be identical. To admit that the

1 Contemporary Indian Philosophy, George Allen & Unwin, 1936, p.p.282, 283.

ultimate goal of religious endeavour cannot adequately be described in terms of personal relationship is to change that goal. In Hinduism this is not so difficult. The ultimate aim of life in much of Hindu thought is either the merging of oneself with the Absolute in the sense of realising one's essential identity with the Absolute, or else the realisation of one's essential equality with the Absolute. This means that while the relationship between the worshipper and his God may be important at the popular level, a little thought soon shows that the multiplicity of Gods cannot possibly be regarded as independent beings in their own right and that, consequently, the aim of religious life must be in another direction than relationship with such a God. What one might term a reflective view of religion comes to coincide with the philosophical view. On the other hand, within the Christian tradition, such a change in religious aim is in general not possible. The supreme object of religion is already the supreme object of philosophy. What the Christian must do is find a metaphysical starting point which will allow him to keep intact the essential factor in his religious experience, viz. his experience of relationship to the Almighty.

Rāmānuja And Christian Theology

Rāmānuja attempts to provide a metaphysics which will allow for the ultimate reality of a personal God. In this respect his aims are similar to those of Christian theology, but there are several important differences in their respective positions.

Rāmānuja has no doctrine of creation. He teaches that the world is a part of God, His body. As the body of God, the world is an instrument of God and necessary to God's self-expression. The

relationship between God and the individual soul is modelled on the relation of the soul to the body. As the soul is the ruler of its body so God is the inner ruler of the individual souls.

In contrast, Christian theology teaches that the world is created by God rather than being a part of God and that likewise the individual souls are creations of God rather than parts of Him.

We have seen that Christian religious experience is centered on personal relationship. Rāmānuja also agrees that the worshipper's relation to God must be regarded as fundamental. Does his account provide a metaphysics which safeguards the ultimate value of the personal encounter of the individual with God?

We have already considered the merits of the soul-body metaphor as applied to the relation between Brahman and the world. In the soul-body relation we have direct experience of the immaterial acting on the material, spirit on matter, so that even if we cannot understand <u>how</u> it works we can have no doubt of the fact <u>that</u> it works. When we come to apply this to God the supreme spirit and His relationship to the world, the soul-body analogy gives us confidence of the possibility of such a relationship through our own direct experience.

One of the basic presuppositions of a personal relationship, however, is that there must be freedom on behalf of both parties to respond to each other. Action is incomprehensible apart from the supposition that we are in some respects free agents. Unless this were the case, we should have no way of distinguishing what happens to us from what we make happen, and thus between ourselves and our environment. Does the soul-body relation, with its attendant supposition that the

body is the instrument of the soul, allow for the possibility of the freedom of the individual soul?

On the face of it, the fact that on Rāmānuja's account God and the soul are related as whole to part would seem to militate against the existence of a personal relationship between the two. How can I have such a relationship with my hand or my foot? On the other hand, it may be argued that it is unfair to lay too much stress on what is only a metaphor. Any explanation of the totality of existence must necessarily relate each part of the totality to every other : as part of this explanation the soul must be shown to have some relationship to God other than a personal relationship. It cannot be regarded as a completely independent self-subsistent existence : it must be shown to be dependent for its being on God or the ultimate reality. The fact that Rāmānuja explains this dependence on Brahman as a soul-body, subject-attribute relation no more impairs the possibility of there also being a personal relationship than the fact that in the Christian account the relation between God and His people is described as being that of a potter to the clay he manipulates, denies the possibility of a personal relationship existing between God and man.

This, unfortunately, is a double-edged argument. If it is the case that none of the dependence type relationships mentioned preclude the possibility of a genuine personal relationship between God and man, then it could equally be argued that a monistic type of metaphysics in which God is the sole reality also in no way inhibits the reality of a personal relationship between man and God? However the dependence relationship be conceived, any attempt to work out the details so as to make it comprehensible from the human side, must end in apparently imposing limitations and finitude on the Divine.

We must admit that what appears to be the case from the human side must inevitably be inadequate from the Divine point of ivew. Once this is admitted, however, the thin end of the wedge is driven in and we allow for the possibility of Shankara's type of non-dualism.

In the light of our argument this is a defeatist line to take. As we have seen Shankara's monism effects such a merging of the world with God as to leave no room for action and empirical experience in any commonly understood sense. And if we are to allow the compatibility of personal relationship with any type of metaphysics, then we lose much of the distinctive differences between religious and philosophical points of view and end in a situation where personal preference rather than rational argument determines one's position.

We must try again to tackle the question of the relationship of the individual soul to God or the ultimate reality and tackle the question at its crucial point : the freedom of the individual to respond to the personal approach of God. Is there an account of the relationship between the divine and empirical which maintains the freedom and responsibility of the individual agent?

Shankara's non-dualism must be ruled out. Any personal relationship between God and the soul is confined solely to the empirical world, the realm of māyā. There can be no question of a personal God being ultimately real and as a corollary of this, no question of the individual person having final significance. His choices and decisions take place only in the illusory empirical world. His inner identity with Brahman rules out the possibility of a relationship of any kind with Brahman, let alone a personal relationship.

Does Rāmānuja's soul-body relationship fare better? There is no sense in which I can distinguish between my body's decisions and my decisions. My decisions <u>are</u> my body's decisions in any sense of this phrase. One might say that 'I wanted to climb to the top of the hill, but my legs refused to carry me.' This type of talk is familiar, but we realise that it is just a way of excusing ourselves from not having performed a difficult task. My acceptance of my legs refusal to carry me is simply my decision not to carry out my original intentions. It may be that although I will my legs to carry on they simply collapse under me, so that it becomes difficult to talk of my <u>decision</u> not to climb to the top of the hill. But if it is not my decision, it can even less be described as the decision of my legs : it is simply something that is <u>happening</u> to my legs, has happened to me. In other words, we must conclude that although the soul-body analogy is helpful in showing us the possibility of spirit acting on matter, of an intentional purpose which informs the world, yet it cannot be taken as the whole story. If we cannot distinguish between my decision and my body's decisions, then if we pursue the analogy in relation to God and the world, then what I take to be my decisions cannot really be so, but only the manifestation of God's decisions and from there we come to a position where it is impossible to give any sense to talk about human action. Rāmānuja would not subscribe to such a conclusion and, in fact, the conclusion itself involves a contradiction. By applying the soul-body analogy to the relation between God and the world, we reach a position where the original soul-body relationship is invalidated. But if it is invalidated, then the whole argument collapses. Rāmānuja certainly wishes to ascribe a relative independence to the individual soul and he does discuss the difficulty we have encountered : if God is the inner Ruler of all creatures then must He

not to be held to be responsible for each person's actions? This Rāmānuja strongly denies. While God is responsible for the capacities of the individual soul, he is not responsible for what they do with these capacities. God has given all beings the capacity for activity -

'So as to enable them to accomplish this, He has become their substratum and has entered into them as the principal to whom they are accessory, ... The spiritual being, whose capacities are so dependent on Him, performs of his own accord certain actions ..... But while observing the soul in its doings, The Supreme Spirit himself takes no sides.'[1]

Earlier Rāmānuja has denied the Advaitic view that all individual souls are illusory in the way in which people in dreams are illusory. We can only talk about dream figures as illusory in contrast to real people, but if real people are also to be regarded as illusory, then the contrast can no longer be made and, therefore, the assertion of the illusoriness of real people cannot be made.

In spite of Rāmānuja's assertions concerning the reality and independence of the individual soul, however, it is difficult to understand how this can be compatible with a strict understanding of the soul-body relationship. The independence of action enjoyed by the individual souls can be compared with nothing in our experience of the soul-body relationship and we are forced to the conclusion that such an account of the relation between God and empirical reality is inadequate in accounting for the religious conviction of a personal God and our empirical experience of ourselves as free agents.

What of the Christian position? Can the doctrine of creation provide an account of the relationship between God and the empirical world which will allow for the ultimate reality of a personal God and the

1 Vedartha Saṁgraha, 3; 89

ultimate reality of individual souls who are free to respond to a personal relation with God?

The Christian account of creation is more of a declaration than an explanation. Whereas in reading the Upanishads one is aware of a concern with the perplexing questions of unity and multiplicity, such an interest is absent from the Hebrew writers who were concerned with the destiny and purpose of man in the world. The account of the creation of the world out of nothing is a declaration of the significance of the world, of its complete dependence on God and man's indpendence as an agent. It is a declaration of 'ultimate demand' and 'final succour' which sidesteps theoretical questions of unity and multiplicity. God did not set to work on some inchoate matter, neither did the world proceed from God as a logically necessary self-manifestation. Thus while man is an expression of the will of God he is in no sense a mode of God and so his freedom of action is maintained.

It may be objected that this account explains nothing since there is nothing in our experience which corresponds to the notion of creation out of nothing. Yet we may find some analogy here with our experience of action.

In our ordinary experience of action we are constantly changing the world while being at the same time changed ourselves by it. In a limited way we are the creators of our future. Some activities such as that of the artist are more obviously creative in the sense of bringing into being something which is unlike anything in existence previously. Nevertheless, all action is creation of one kind or another. The doctrine of creation declares the agency of God, and arising out of the creative agency of God, a similar agency in man so

that man as made in the image of God is free and able to respond to the personal approach of God. Can this be adequately conceptualised? It must be remembered that a concept, as a product of thought, is always an abstraction from the fulness of the concrete reality which can only be adequately appreciated in encounter. If this is granted, it becomes legitimate to describe the world as God's action and the relation between God and the world as that of agent to act. This is an account which allows both for the world's complete dependence on God for its being without making the relation between God and the world a logically necessary relationship, and at the same time allows for the possibility of independent human agents who can choose whether or not to co-operate with God in His purposes.

Since a concept is always an abstraction from the fulness of actuality, this means that where the initiation of action is concerned there is always an element of surprise and of the unexpected which is not present in thought. In thought the conclusions follow logically from the premisses and given sufficient expertise and care one can always work out the conclusions. But there is no such logical sequence in the case of action and in the course of any ongoingexperience there can never be any absolute certainty as to the outcome. It can always be said, as for example it is said about marriage, that one can never know what it will be like until one is married and actually experiences it for oneself. This is because action involves personal encounter without which life is an abstraction. Only within the framework of personal encounter can thought be developed. Science, poetry, music, to mention but a few of the products of thought, would be impossible without people to read the scientific journals, listen to the music, appreciate the poetry.

Summing up, we conclude that the Christian doctrine of creation interpreted in terms which make action central, is the only satisfactory understanding of the relation between God and empirical reality which both allows for the reality of a personal God and for the ultimate significance of individual persons. It is satisfactory because it maintains intact the values which we take to be implicit in the personal life of interaction with things and other people.

I said at the beginning of this Chapter that the consideration of the nature of religious experience and the consideration of the basis of social ethics, two of the questions which prompted the present study, were interlinked in that both concern the basis and significance of personal values. As it is to persons that experience occurs, the personal element is allpervasive : the problem lies in elucidating the nature of this personal element. If this can be determined we have a clue to the nature of the reality which we apprehend. This has ethical repercussions as an account of the nature of reality implies an account of what is of ultimate and enduring worth and this must have implications for our practical day-to-day existence. This does not imply that there is one ultimate 'conception of the personal' to which all accounts of experience must aspire. Nor does it imply that all experience must be viewed in terms of the experiencing individual. An individual is not necessarily a person. A person is an individual of a very specific type and what may be termed roughly 'elements of the personal' need not belong only to persons, and in fact in some views, may not occur first in persons.

The metaphysical and ethical implications of the conception of the personal were illustrated in terms of the analysis of the previous Chapter. There two accounts of the nature of the personal were

contrasted : that which regards the subject of experience as a knower or thinker and that which treats the self as an agent. In the former case it was argued that the reality of other people and of the world became problematic and solipsism unavoidable. If other people were to exist at all they must be identical with my self. Ethically, the adoption of the standpoint of the knowing subject was found to imply a refusal to enter into genuine relationships with other people. This was the consequence of the denial of a genuine 'other' who could respond to my actions as I respond to his. On the other hand, starting from the standpoint of the self as agent the reality of the 'other', whether person or thing, was seen to be as indubitable as the reality of myself, since it is only in relationship with the other that I come to be aware of myself. For example, in walking I become aware simultaneously of my foot touching the ground and of the ground supporting my weight. The ethical corollary of this was found to be a set of values grounded firmly in acceptance of and consideration of the 'other'.

The concepts of dharma and moksha are important for both metaphysics and ethics. An account of moksha is an account of ultimate reality and also generates a standard against which to judge the values of empirical existence. These are primarily delineated in the concept of dharma.

Dharma And Moksha

The concepts of dharma and moksha are examined in two articles by J.A.B.van Buitenen and Daniel H.H.Ingalls.[1] The popular view of moksha is of freedom from the shackles of empirical existence and the complete transcendence of empirical life. Alongside this view of the end of life,

1 Both entitled Dharma and Moksha in Philosophy East and West, Vol·VII, Nos.1 and 2, April:July, 1957.

however, stands a contrasting view. This centres on the values of artha, kāma and dharma and so affirms the reality of this present existence. The concept which concerns us here is dharma. The dharma of a thing is that which makes the thing what it is and whose exercise gives that thing its characteristic excellence. (cf the arête of Aristotle) It is the dharma of the sun to shine as it is the dharma of the tree to bear fruit and likewise man has his own characteristic dharma which is expressed in terms of the realisation of his particular potentialities.

It emerges clearly from the two articles that although moksha became accepted into the Vedic tradition at a fairly early stage and attempts were made to show its continuity with other traditional aims (artha, kāma, dharma and moksha) there is really a basic conflict between the two sets of values. Dharma and its associated ideas is the older conception and presents a this-worldly goal for man. It was the standard and value of the Brahmins, the traditional upholders of Vedic society. On the other hand, the goal of moksha involving the complete transcendence of empirical life was propounded first by monks and sannyāsins who had in any case already opted out of life and society with its attendant obligations.

The values associated with dharma imply the acceptance of a pluralistic world in which individual things have their own natures (svabhāva) and must develop their own characteristic excellences. These different natures, however, are not in conflict but each contribute to the maintenance of a grand cosmic pattern. Van Buitenen says

'Dharma is the observance of the necessary acts that keep the world intact ..... (it) is the cosmically or "religiously" determined activity of all existing beings to maintain the normal order in the world ..... These activities called dharmas are imposed as a kind of

natural law on all existent beings in the universe.'[1]

The concept of dharma has affinities with the older Vedic concept of ṛta. Ṛta referred to the cosmic forces of law and order which operated over the whole of experience and which sometimes, but by no means always, were thought to be divinely imposed. Like dharma, ṛta has both natural and moral connotations. It signified both the regularity and order in nature and the moral order. The law of nature writ large in the universe is taken to be paralleled to the moral law written into the being of man. These two aspects of ṛta are linked in the idea that by perfectly fulfilling one's function in the universe one can bend cosmic forces to do one's will. W.Norman Brown gives an excellent account of this.[2] He points out that the idea goes back to the Ṛig Veda and attempts to explain the theory behind the belief. By performing one's duty perfectly one thereby put oneself in complete harmony with the cosmic forces and hence was able to achieve a god-like power over them.

'It put the performer in full accord with cosmic forces that cause ..... the whole range of natural phenomena and the powers inherent in them, which constitute truth on a cosmic scale and are included in the concept of ṛta. The gods themselves often seem to possess their power through adherence to their Truth, which appears to be their function in the cosmos. They are satyadharman, having Truth as their basic law or principle.'[3]

By the time of the Upaniṣads the idea that knowledge brings power was firmly established and this, linked with the text aham brahmasmi, I am

1 Op.Cit.P.36

2 The Metaphysics of the Truth Act, in Mélanges d'Indianisme a la Mémoire de Louis Renou, Paris, 1968.

3 IBID.P.174

Brahman, provided the rationale for the belief that

'the one who attains Brahman has power over all. Thus he who by whatever means ..... attains to perfection may be thought to have the power of the Absolute, which he has become, and to influence cosmic forces in whatever way he wills.'[1]

The notion of a unity of natural and moral law has many parallels. The Stoics conceived the ideal of life to be expressed by 'following Nature', where the nature of man was conceived as part and parcel of the wider nature of the universe as a whole. Likewise the Chinese express the same thought in the ideal of conforming to the Tao. The Hebrews in the Old Testament also had a similar idea. The phrase the 'path of God' was used to refer both to God's path through creation and also to the path which man ought to tread if he was to order his life in conformity to God's will.

Whereas dharma involves the acceptance of cosmic law, the pursuit of moksha involves the abrogation of the natural law to which one is subject and which gives one one's characteristic excellence. It is the attempt to break free from the endless cycle of actions and their fruits and, therefore, from the endless chain of rebirth. It is the fact that each action must inevitably have a consequence of some form that results in our being chained to empirical life by necessity. This doctrine of act and fruit (karma and phala) is accepted as axiomatic by Hindus. It is not so much that an opportunity must be provided for us to atone for our misdeeds, as might at first sight appear to be the case, as simply that each act must have its consequence as every cause is followed by an effect. However perfectly one may fulfil one's dharma the final result will still be a repetition of empirical existence in some form. Only by reaching a state which is totally beyond action and, therefore,

1 IBID. P.175

totally beyond good and evil can one finally achieve the freedom which is the aim of moksha. Moksha can be understood as the complete rebellion against all forms of empirical existence, however perfectly they may be expressed. It amounts to the view that while empirical existence may be improved it has yet certain inherent defects and limitations which mean that it can never be an ultimately desirable end. This may be taken as holding for all accounts of moksha. While there is considerable disagreement amongst the various schools of philosophy as to the positive content of moksha, they are all agreed that negatively it means freedom from the shackles of empirical existence. This implies freedom from dharma.

Superficially it might appear that the concept of dharma is life-affirming and that of moksha life-negating and that consequently ethical thought might be served better by the development of the notion of dharma in conjunction with a metaphysics which was basically pluralistic. Rāmānuja's thought immediately suggests itself as a possibility. Contemporary thought, however, has not in general looked to Rāmānuja to provide the inspiration for a dynamic social ethics, but to the monism of Shankara.

This has generally involved a reinterpretation of the traditional understanding of moksha and a re-emphasising of certain aspects. From the traditional point of view the emphasis has fallen on the essential unreality of all empirical characteristics. This has resulted in the under-valuation of the individual person as such and a lack of interest in improving the lot of the unfortunate.

This, of course, is not peculiar to Hinduism. At one point Christians also tended to accept that God had appointed every man to his station and that the under-dog should remain the under-dog.

This, as we saw in Chapter Two, was one of the consequences of the acceptance by Christian theologians of the 'two-gods-in-one' of Plato : the self-sufficient, immutable being and the being of a limitless fecundity who wills that every possible being should have existence. The 'principle of continuity' which stemmed from the latter conception of God lead to the view that each order of creation and station of life played a necessary part in the fulness of God's creation and that, therefore, to rebel against one's lot and to seek to better oneself was to rebel against God. We have argued that this is not an adequate philosophical account of the Christian conception of God .

In contemporary discussion, however, it is the underlying unity and identity of each individual which is emphasised. Since moksha is the realisation of one's self-identity with Brahman it follows that every other person must equally be regarded as Brahman and, in consequence, is entitled to the same respect that I give myself. The oneness of humanity as essentially identical with Brahman is used to provide the motive for social service. However, if one remembers that the oneness of humanity on this analysis is a oneness in which all empirical differences are transcended, it is doubtful whether this fact can legitimately be used to provide the motive for action in a world of empirical differences.

The point to be considered is whether a monistic metaphysics can provide the motivation for a life in which empirical differences are perpetuated. I am told to regard every man as an extension of myself and, correspondingly, to extend the goodwill to him that I feel naturally for myself. This undoubtedly does provide inspiration for action, but it would be wrong to suppose that in accepting it as such

I am accepting a monistic metaphysics. It is only as long as a certain degree of difference as well as a degree of identity is allowed that it can provide a motive for action. I must suppose that as well as an essential identity with myself which provides the motive for my actions towards him, there is also a real degree of empirical difference which will be removed or altered by means of my actions; and this provides the intention of my action. If the empirical differentia by which I consider this other person as a different person from myself are unreal, then why should I attempt the futile task of changing something essentially unreal? Further, my empirical characteristics must also be regarded as unreal and this includes my feelings of benevolence generated by the thought of our essential identity. So long as no ultimate differentiation is to be allowed, none of these human feelings can be allowed reality either.

Two Interpretations Of Dharma

In the appendix to the previous Chapter I suggested that it was possible to view Hindu ethics and social customs as a direct corollary of the adoption of the standpoint of the knowing subject, the mere spectator. According to MacMurray's analysis, one possible consequence of rejecting a relationship with the 'other' was that one's actions and morality became a matter of good form, of doing what was socially acceptable, conforming in externals while one's real life becomes centered in oneself and one's imagination. I argued that the description of the morality of good form was applicable to many traditional facets of Hindu life such as the caste system, the four stages of life, the emphasis on ritual. Once Shankara's metaphysical position is adopted, one's real life becomes viewed in terms of the blissful experience of identification with Brahman. This cuts directly across everyday experience which, however, cannot be altogether neglected as the smooth

running of everyday affairs are a part of the conditions which allow for the possibility of the mystical experience which is one's real life. Consequently, while ordinary life cannot be treated with absolute seriousness, it cannot be dismissed and the result is that actions, and hence morality, become a matter of expertise and good taste.

This interpretation, however, is a late development, the result of adding moksha to the original trio of artha, kāma and dharma. Only when moksha is set in contrast to the other aims do they begin to be interpreted negatively. So long as the concept of dharma is central the reality of the present life is affirmed and dharma is interpreted positively as expressing the natural law of society. On this reading, the good for man can be achieved and a harmonious social order established, only if each person fulfils his own particular dharma and plays his special part in the general pattern of life. The same idea prevailed in Greek society and was expressed by Plato in the Republic.

Whereas on the negative interpretation one's actions are primarily a matter of doing the 'right' or expected thing rather than an expression of one's real thoughts and feelings, on the positive analysis one's actions must all be seen as a genuine expression of one's nature and there is no remainder apart from one's public role which could be regarded as one's 'real' life. This interpretation of action, which makes the concept of dharma central, paints a somewhat Hegelian picture. The concept of dharma is concerned both with the good for the individual and the good for society as a whole. They are inter-related in such a way that the total good determines the individual good and the individual can only achieve his highest

potential by fulfilling his appointed role in society. This leads to the possibility that the individual may not always be correct in his interpretation of what is in his best interests and of what would be the genuine expression of his dharma. Because there exists a general and total cosmic pattern into which each individual fits and in which each plays a particular part, he may need to accept the word of some superior authority. This superior authority in classical Hindu society appears to have been the king. The king was regarded as the mediator of dharma and his presence as the stabilising and cohesive force in society. The Hindus had a great fear of the break-down of authority as represented by the king and the consequent dissolution of society. This is expressed in the Rāmāyana. There, the fear is voiced that when a country has no king it will come to destruction. A long list of the evils attendant on a people who have no king is given, and these range from drought to atheism. Not only does the king 'separate good and evil', but without him, even the simple pleasures of life are neglected : 'there do not flourish festivals and gatherings with many actors and dancers.'[1]

Criticisms

The idea of a general cosmic pattern into which each individual fits makes sense when applied to the inanimate world and is not contradicted by the findings of science. Yet when we try to apply it to human society there is nothing corresponding to the natural laws of science which could be taken as an overall pattern for human life. In the absence of settled and traditional ways of life, the concept of society as a harmonious whole in which each individual, by fulfilling his appointed role is able to benefit both himself and society to the maximum, is little more than a dream.

1 Rāmāyana 2.61, Translation by Dr.J.L.Brockington

The concept of dharma encounters the same difficulties when applied to society as does the Hegelian ideal and is subject in practice to the same corruptions. Who is to be entrusted with the task of 'separating good and evil', of determining what is dharma for society and the individual? Further, what is there to guarantee the authority of this person or group of persons, and is there any safeguard against the abuse of power by those in authority?

Apart from these practical problems, the very concept of dharma with its associated concept of svabhāva (own nature) of each class of beings is no longer appropriate to Hindu society in the form in which it has been traditionally interpreted. The caste system, which constituted an important element in determining the dharma of each individual has been officially disowned by the Indian government, and is no longer regarded as an integral part of Hindu ethics. The self-contained rural economy which gave stability to the forms of society has given way to new forms of industrial life in which the svāhhava of the different classes is no longer apparent.

Dharma As Duty

The notion of dharma has been reinterpreted by contemporary Hindus like S. Radhakrishnan so as to avoid reference to the notions of caste and class. Dharma is conceived as an ideal of selfless devotion to one's duty, without thought of any reward for oneself, in a way very similar to that of Kant's categorical imperative which demands reverence and obedience without any thought to the possible benefit that may accrue to oneself from doing the right action. His interpretation of dharma is traced back to the Bhagavad-Gītā. There we find a synthesis of the originally conflicting ideals of dharma and moksha.

The ideal of dharma implies action in accordance with the law of one's nature. This is the path of karmayoga, the way of salvation through action. In contrast, the path of jñānayoga, salvation through knowledge, implies the transcendence and abnegation of the empirical world of action. These ideals were synthesised in the view that one should act in accordance with dharma, but without any desire for the fruits of one's actions. By acting without a desire for the fruits of one's action, one inhibited the karma which would otherwise accrue from action. Moksha was attained when one achieved the condition of completely passionless action.

In the context of the Bhagavad-Gītā the content of dharma, or duty, was determined in part at least by consideration of caste. Thus Arjuna is urged to fight because he is a warrior and he would be untrue to his dharma as a warrior if he allowed himself to be moved by his feelings of pity and refused to fight. Radhakrishnan, however, interprets dharma in a more general way as adherence to the moral law. The modern account of dharma then accepts the traditional ideal of passionless action, but develops it without reference to its classical context of caste.

Dharma As Self-Realisation

The concept of dharma implies an essentially differentiated universe : there is no point in talking about the dharma of anything if it cannot be contrasted with the dharma of some other thing. The fundamental contrast drawn at the beginning of the Chapter was between a standpoint which took as its ultimate value self-realisation as interpreted in terms of a monistic metaphysics, and a standpoint which took ultimate value to be constituted by some kind of personal

relationship and focussed, therefore, on the interpersonal. In view of the fact that a value-system oriented around dharma and one oriented around interpersonal relationships, both imply a pluralistic account of the world, it may be useful to see if they are alike in any other respects. In particular, does the concept of dharma allow for the importance of the interpersonal element?

Although dharma derives its significance from the fact that other people and other things also have their own particular nature (svabhāva) and are, therefore, able to fulfil their own dharma, yet my pursuit of dharma in no way depends on the co-operation or interaction of anyone or anything else. What is dharma for me is to be found by my consulting the law of my own nature and not anything outside myself. Dharma as an aim of life is as much a process of self-realisation as is moksha. As an illustration of this we can take the famous example, which we have already mentioned, from the Bhagavad-Gītā of Arjuna on the eve of battle, full of doubt and despair over his proposed course of action. He is involved in fighting a war of honour against his own kinsmen; rather than shed fraternal blood he is ready to give up the whole undertaking. Krishna as an incarnation of the God Vishnu, however, comes to his aid with divine counsel. He points out to Arjuna that there are two ways of looking at this situation, what might be termed the divine and the human. From the divine or ultimate point of view, the bodies of the men who will inevitably be slain if the war continues are not the essential aspect of these men. The real self of each is something other than the mind or body or any other part of what we would on the ordinary plane recognise as human nature. On the divine level there is neither a slayer nor a slain, for the empirical selves which are affected by these actions are quite different from the real self which

is one and the same for all. This is not to be regarded as a divine licence to do as one likes. The force of it is that from the divine point of view, the empirical world of action is meaningless. In Arjuna's situation this thought may give him courage to do what is right through the knowledge that any apparent ill-effects of his actions, such as the killing of kinsmen, is only apparent and that their real selves remain untouched. While viewing things from the divine standpoint may be a comfort and a reassurance, the decision as to what is the right course of action must be made from the human standpoint and taking into consideration the relevant empirical facts. In Arjuna's case, the correct decision is that he should fight because he is a warrior and it is his duty as a warrior to fight in this situation. If he were to give up his honour would be lost, he would not have realised his nature as a warrior and this is unthinkable. Arjuna's dharma as a warrior consisted in his fighting honourable wars, including this one, and the fact that his kinsmen were involved could not alter this fact. Here we see that as it was Arjuna's nature to be a warrior so his dharma was to fight and only by so doing could he achieve the realisation of his nature. The situation portrays doubt and dilemma as to the right course of action, but the final decision is made, not by a confrontation with an 'other' which forces him to reassess himself and his actions, but by a looking inward at his own nature and thereby determining the correct means of expressing it.

In contrast we could cite some Pauline statements which are clear expressions of the interpersonal element in decision-making. For example, 'the love of God constrains us' and 'I am all things to all men in order that by all means I might save some.'

This is not the whole story however. We mentioned earlier the

affinities between the Hindu notion of dharma and other related notions such as the Hebrew idea of the 'path of God'. The idea common to both is that there is a certain moral order in the universe, it is only by conforming to this moral order that one can realise one's full potential as a human being. In both cases this might be interpreted to mean that the good life is lived primarily for the agent's spiritual benefits. This outlook might also appear to be perpetuated in the New Testament in the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The emphasis on the spiritual rewards to be reaped by pursuing certain attitudes or courses of action is remarkable. A full discussion of this question would require an account of the relation between law and grace which was one of the important problems for the early Christian writers. I shall only offer a few comments. Perhaps one of the most important differences between the concept of dharma and that of the path of God is that the law of God was conceived as given by God as the means whereby man could express his love for God whereas dharma, as we saw, is a more impersonal notion connected with the general concept of truth, satya, which has no need of a divine being to operate it. Thus while the law and implicitly the agent's spiritual benefits are undoubtedly of great importance in the Christian tradition, yet they are important within the overall framework of a personal relationship, The personal element is primary and the law is a means to the fulfilment of the personal relationship, which may be overridden if necessary. Thus, David's eating of the bread from the temple, although it was against the law, did not result in a rupture in his relationship with God.

Can Non-Dualism Provide A Basis For Ethical Concern?

Ethics and metaphysics have traditionally been closely associated in the Hindu thought. Amongst contemporary writers both Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo endeavour to provide a metaphysical justification for

their moral views and it is common to find Advaitic philosophers claiming that Advaitism provides the most convincing rationale for an ethic of universal love. We must, therefore, ask whether this is so and in this section I shall consider whether non-dualist metaphysics, such as that of Shankara, can provide a basis for ethical concern and personal value. It must be remembered that Shankara himself was not primarily concerned with the ethical consequences of his position. These were developed fully only by later writers of the school.

The crux of the matter lies in the degree of reality which can be attributed to the empirical world. Any metaphysics which is to be relevant to contemporary thought must allow for the reality and significance of the trials and struggles of life.

If the reality of the empirical world is guaranteed then prima facie so is the reality and significance of what goes on in the empirical world. For example, my worship of God is real; the helping hand I offer to my neighbour does make some appreciable difference to the amount of good in the general scheme of things; it is worth my while to take a stand and struggle to maintain what I believe to be the right. If empirical existence is to be judged unreal, then these simple things do begin to appear useless and trivial. This is what makes Shankara's non-dualism unappealing. The world is simply māyā, anirvacanīya.

But from Shankara's point of view there is a fundamental flaw in this reasoning. He does not start from a premiss of little regard for the world even though this may appear to be entailed by his conclusions. Rather he starts from the self-luminous value of an immanent and transcendent reality. The reality of Brahman is the

overwhelming truth of things and everything else must be fitted into its own place in this scheme. The experience of the overwhelming reality of Brahman implies the possibility of release, moksha. The state of moksha is identical with the realisation of Brahman's self-shining light. We have already noted the importance to Shankara of the question, what must reality be like in order that moksha be possible? His answer to this is that so long as karma, that which binds us to Samsāra, the round of empirical existence, be real, then there can be no possibility of release. Karma is accumulated by actions so that as long as the real nature of man is regarded as being constituted by his actions then there can be no possibility of him achieving moksha, the state of blessedness, which is quite beyond actions. It follows from this that in the light of the self-shining reality that is Brahman, the empirical world cannot be regarded as real. But it does not follow from this that it is necessarily unreal in the sense of being illusory and, therefore, trivial, though it may be difficult not to draw this conclusion.

Is the whole controversy simply a play on words which can be settled if we can only agree on the different senses in which the terms 'real' and 'reality' are being used? The issue may be compared in certain respects with the argument between the idealists and the exponents of commonsense in Britain at the turn of the century. Rāmānuja, as can be seen from his arguments, wishes to use the term 'reality' so that we understand by moksha, the ultimate reality, something which can be made sense of in terms of the reality that we experience from day to day. His motivation is similar to that which inspired G.E. Moore to his defence of the reality of the external world. In the same way that Moore focussed attention on our ordinary use of words and forced philosophy to reinterpret metaphysical claims

in terms of the ordinary sense of the words involved, so Rāmānuja appealed again and again to commonsense and experience to back up his claims about the nature of consciousness. On the other hand, Shankara could reply that Rāmānuja was missing the point. In claiming that consciousness was the only reality, he was not intending in any way to deny the empirical validity of any of the usual claims made about consciousness. Just as the idealists in saying, for example, that time is unreal, in no way intended to deny that an interval elapsed between one day and the next, so, Shankara could argue, his claim that consciousness alone was real was in no way intended to deny that, in our ordinary empirical experience, consciousness was usually experienced as being the attribute of a conscious subject. Once the sense in which certain key terms such as 'reality' and 'consciousness' are being used is ascertained, then it might be claimed that much of the argument is seen to be simply about words. This is true, but at the same time we are left with the question of what is in fact being referred to by these terms if they are not being used in their ordinary sense.

It is an oversimplification to say that Shankara is logical without being comprehensible, while Rāmānuja is comprehensible without being logical, yet there is a certain truth in this. On the question of the reality of karma, critics of Rāmānuja say that because he insists on the reality of the empirical world and, therefore, of karma, in order to explain how it is that the soul is finally freed from the fruits of its actions, he has to invoke the grace of God, which by an arbitary fiat, as it were, causes the karma of the soul to lose its efficacy. In Shankara's case, karma is not ultimately real and so there is no problem in explaining how its effects cease to operate on the liberated soul. We have here a contrast between the actual

and the ideal. On the one hand, we have the conditions of our empirical life which make our aspirations possible, while on the other hand, our aspirations seem to point to something beyond the empirical world, to a state of perfection which can never be attained in the empirical world. Karma is woven into the fabric of empirical existence. We cannot live without actions and every action must inexorably bear its fruit. We may act well, but also we may act badly. So long as empirical existence continues, both possibilities must be equally open to us. The ultimate desirable state, however, is one which is beyond action. This is accepted as axiomatic by both Shankara and Rāmānuja, as it was by Plato. Given this situation we can reconcile the two aspects either by denying the reality of one, as does Shankara, or as Rāmānuja, apparently having his cake and eating it, by accepting the reality of both, but appealing to some external factor such as God to effect the change from one to the other. Shankara then is logical for he does order reality in terms of one simple principle such that relations between the parts are all internal. But it is doubtful whether he is comprehensible. As we have pointed out on several occasions, what he means by such terms as reality and consciousness are not to be construed in their ordinary interpretations, yet no satisfactory alternative is proferred. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, may be understood, for what he is talking about may be spelled out in terms of ordinary experience. But the final picture which he paints cannot be regarded as entirely coherent. The gap between the actual and the ideal is not bridged, but only described. Karma is eternal, the soul in its essential nature is free from karma. The grace of God is invoked in order to effect the transition from one state of the soul to the other, but this can

never provide a logical answer.

This connects up with the question previously discussed concerning the relationship of the world and the individual soul with God. The point raised there was whether it was possible to give an account of the relationship between the empirical world and the ultimate reality such as to allow for the ultimacy of a personal God and of individual selves who were free to respond to the personal approach of God. We contrasted on the one hand, Shankara and Rāmānuja's accounts of the relationship which we characterised as theoretical in that they were concerned to give a logically satisfactory answer to the problem of reconciling unity with multiplicity; and on the other hand, the Christian account, which sidestepped the issue by the practical declaration of God's action in creating out of nothing the world which contains free agents who are capable of responding to God's love. The significance of the Christian approach is that it starts from the primacy of the practical and within this framework, theoretical activity can take its place.

It is not altogether fair to characterise Rāmānuja's approach as theoretical as we have noted the significance which he attaches to action. We saw, in fact, that his insistence on the reality and independence of action of the individual soul was, strictly speaking, incompatible with his interpretation of the world and the individual souls as together comprising the body of God of which God is the Inner Ruler. Here we find Rāmānuja breaking out of the strictly theoretical framework in order to do justice to the facts of experience as he sees them. The same thing occurs in his doctrine of karma being dissolved by the grace of God. Shankara's system attempts to order experience in such a way as to show a

necessary logical connection between each aspect : in order to do this we must treat action and karma as illusory. Rāmānuja, as his critics point out, is not able to show any necessary connection between the empirical condition of the soul where it is bound by karma and its condition in the state of release when it is characterised by pure intelligence and bliss, and must perforce invoke the grace of God in order to effect a transition. But is this a criticism? Granted that the world must be conceived as unity, need it be a unity of thought? Why not a unity of action? We have already seen that the experience of action brings into existence something new. Action always implies the possibility of change and this is part and parcel of our everyday experience. We can see on the human level the effect of personal encounter on another's life. The effect of one person on another may produce changes which could never be accounted for in terms of pure logic.

This can all be put in another way in terms of the contrast between necessary and contingent truths. A necessary truth is one which is true no matter what the circumstances, whereas a contingent truth depends for its truth value on particular circumstances. A great deal has been made of this contrast in distinguishing the human and the divine. Although man has need of other human beings in order to exist and his existence is thus contingent, God has need of no-one other than himself; he remains completely the same and unaffected by all changing empirical circumstances. Once this absolute contrast has been drawn, however, it seems difficult to express the relationship between the empirical and the divine, the finite and the infinite. Thus for Shankara the Absolute, Brahman, is being, consciousness, infinity, sad cid anantam. Brahman is also the self

within man. But what of the obvious multiplicity around us? How is it related to being, consciousness, infinity? For Shankara, the effect is contained in the cause, the world as the effect of Brahman must, therefore, be contained within Brahman and must, therefore, be regarded as effectively the same as Brahman. This leads naturally to the view that the world is māyā, illusion, a false view of reality.

The interesting thing about this is the basic assumption that in giving an explanation of the totality of existence, it is a unity of thought that is called for. The effect is said to be already present in the cause in the same way that conclusions are contained in the premisses of an argument. This implies that as the conclusions follow necessarily from the premisses, so the world is necessarily related to God. The unity of infinite and finite is a logically necessary unity. This means that if moksha is the realisation of one's identity with Brahman there is no sense in which Brahman, by his grace, needs to bring about this realisation. In fact, such a bringing about would be an action and there can be no place for genuine action in the doctrine that the effect is contained in the cause. For if it is, then nothing really new is ever being produced and all relationships amongst things produced and their cause must be necessary. It is obvious, however, that actions do not belong to the class of things which we regard as inevitable as conclusions from premisses are inevitable. Actions are influenced by a multitude of different factors and produce new states of affairs which are quite different from the causes which lead to them. The upshot of this is that if God is an Absolute, necessary being, such that there is no contingency and relativity in Him, then this allows no place for action. Action is unreal, and, ultimately, so is history.

But is there any reason why an account of the relationship between the empirical world and the ultimate reality should contain nothing but necessary relationships? This is to give primacy to thought and to deny action. Whereas thought, taken by itself, excludes action, action taken by itself, includes thought, as was shown in the previous Chapter. A unity of action would include a conceptual element, but it would not proceed entirely in terms of logically necessary propositions : it would allow a place for contingent truths as well. These ideas have been developed at length by various writers such as Charles Hartshorne and John Macmurray.[1]

If we are considering Rāmānuja's account of the totality of existence as a unity of action which includes thought, it would be no criticism of him that the grace of God is invoked in order to effect the transition from the empirical condition of the soul bound by karma to its condition in a state of release. If action is an essential feature of the world then the action of God on the soul in bringing about moksha is scarcely surprising. On the other hand, although Rāmānuja allows a place for action and insists that the soul is a conscious agent rather than sheer consciousness there are insufficient grounds for supposing that he would want to describe the world as a unity of action.

Salient Features Of Shankara's Thought

As we have argued above, Shankara's position is both logical, yet incomprehensible. No significant meaning can be given to the key terms beyond saying that they are not being used in their ordinary

1 Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity, Yale University Press, 1948.

John Macmurray, The Self As Agent and Persons In Relation.

sense. The reality to which they refer eludes us always : speech and words draw back from it. We can only trust to the actual experience of reality to make talk about it meaningful. Resulting from this, it is also ambiguous. Opposite conclusions may be arrived at from one and the same premiss. Traditionally the non-dualist position has been taken to imply world-renunciation, yet in contemporary thought there are those who take the opposite view and interpret it as implying a positive attitude of concern for the world. I shall argue that this ambiguity is an inherent feature of non-dualism and that it arises because the argument does not allow for a sufficient number of real terms. Certain issues are of such complexity that they cannot be discussed, or even be meaningful, unless it be allowed that the argument has a certain number of terms. If this is not so, the argument becomes simply a play on words with no force.

Fallacious Arguments Based On Non-Dualism[1]

If there is one only, then it follows that there is no other. It is impossible then to initiate any discussion which involves the 'other'. If, however, an 'other' is assumed there can be no internal link between the other and the one and, therefore, there is no limit on what may be predicated of the 'other' or the way in which it may relate to the 'one'. This means that within the context of non-dualism, any argument which involves an 'other' must necessarily be inconclusive

1 The ethical implications of non-dualism were not developed by Shankara himself, but by later non-dualist thinkers. It has been pointed out to me that the arguments in the following pages are similar to those used by the Prāsaṅgika school, a sub-school of Buddhism, in the 5th century AD. This school accepted that it could not logically establish its own views and used its opponents' principles and procedure to demolish their views. Shankara must have been aware of the arguments of the Prāsaṅgikas and so would be aware, presumably, of the way they could be applied to a non-dualist system such as his own.

and its contrary may always be formulated. Thus it is possible both to argue that non-dualism provided a basis for universal brotherhood and that it must inevitably lead to self-love and neglect of the world.

The possibility of providing ambiguous and contrary arguments arises because difference is illicitly imported into a context where, in fact, it has no place. Thus it seems to follow from the proposition that there is one only without a second that the person confronting me is really myself. And from this one can argue either that since the other person is myself, then his interests have as much right to be consulted as have my own and that, therefore, I ought to take him into consideration in everything that I do; or one can argue that since he is identical with myself, then in helping myself I am helping him and that, therefore, I am justified in neglecting his interests in favour of my own. The fallacy in this reasoning lies in the initial deduction from the proposition that there is one only, to the conclusion that the other person is myself. This reasoning is invalid since if there is one only, then it is impossible to distinguish myself as a separate being, let alone another person. There can be no deductions or arguments from the premiss that there is one only. The proposition that the other is myself is one which can only be made sense of and used to provide a motivation for action in the context of a system in which there are a number of terms, for example, there must be myself, the other, our mutual environment, the relation between us, and the criteria for the identification of us both. Once these several factors are made determinate, then it becomes possible to discuss the question of whether acceptance of the proposition provides or does not provide a motivation for other regarding action. So long as these are not determinate, the proposition is meaningless and arguments only appear to follow from it as a result of jumbled thinking.

Although the proposition, apart from a determinate context, may be meaningless in the sense of not providing a basis for deduction, it may yet be a useful proposition. On the assumption that one is aiming at the realisation of the One, then meditation on the thought that the other is myself may bring about the desired state of illumination. We may compare the proposition, tat twam asi, that thou art. This saying plays a major role in the ascent from the world of plurality to the realisation of the one. From meditating on this statement of oneness, the realisation of oneness may suddenly flood in on the soul. But there is no deduction involved, either 'upwards' or 'downwards'. The realisation of oneness is a matter of intuition and not of reason : the statement, that thou art, has not been arrived at by considering what is the case empirically.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that a metaphysics of non-dualism cannot provide a reference for the discussion of ethical problems or indeed of any problems. The reason for this is that discussion inevitably presupposes the reality of more than one term and non-dualism simply refuses to recognise more than one term ultimately.

Why then, if non-dualism has this inherent deficiency, have there been so many such systems and why does a system such as Shankara's have such tremendous appeal? The answer may lie partly in the laziness of the human mind which finds it easier to think a one-term system and shrinks from the complexities involved in the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of inter-related terms. Once a one-term account of reality is assumed, then it becomes possible to iron out all that is not apparently in agreement in the ways in which Shankara does. So long as the basic mistake is overlooked, i.e. the mistake of trying

to make any deduction whatsoever from the proposition that reality is one, the resultant system is so closely knit as a result of being based on one single term, that if it is the work of a subtle and logical mind, it is bound to have tremendous appeal.

On the other hand, the interconnectedness of everything within the frame of reference of a monistic system makes it difficult to resist. We must think of everything in experience as interconnected and, therefore, as a unity. When once we admit an ultimate pluralism or dualism it becomes difficult to explain this interconnectedness. Where we get a dualism of mind and matter in the West, for example, the problem arises of explaining why mind should act on matter or why matter should be moved by mind. In a similar way in the Sāṁkhya system, which admits an ultimate duality of purusha and prakṛti, it is impossible to explain why the presence of purusha should cause prakṛti to evolve.

Emotionally, too, non-dualism has tremendous appeal. After the hard wrestling with terms and abstractions which even some of the most subtle thinkers have concluded must inevitably leave us with contradictions in reality and loop-holes in thought which can never be plugged, it is an immense relief to conclude that the world is not ultimately amenable to reason, and that, as the snake turns out to be but a rope when viewed in daylight, so when experienced in terms of the larger whole of reality, the contradictions and frustrations of thought will be seen to be satisfactorily completed in a whole which is not thought. Not least are the attractions of such an ideal from the point of view of practical life. There are times when one looks at the human situation and feels that reconciliation and understanding between man and man is something that can never be

achieved however much one or both parties struggle : when one relationship after another is shown to be other than the understanding of it by the parties involved : when the intricate network of human relationships is taken simply as a means to one's own ends : in such situations then an ideal in which the separate individualities of all are no more, and the feuds and antagonisms which rack the human race are seen as no more than ripples on the surface of the vast sea, is of great appeal. The thought that all these perplexities need not be accepted as ultimate may even give one a perspective which enables one to face them with courage and endurance. However, the ineffable nature of the experience also leaves it open to the objection that there is no criterion by which it can be judged, as we have already seen. Any experience must be judged in terms of its relation to other experiences and to life as a whole. The difficulty with the experience of sad cid ananda is that it cannot be related to any other experiences as, in its classical interpretation, it does not even allow for the recognition of any 'other'. Strictly, one should keep absolutely silent.

Although non-dualism as a metaphysical system cannot be used to further ethical deductions, yet this is not to say that the non-dual intuition of the universe is thereby discredited. Far from it. The argument has simply shown that pure non-dualism cannot provide a basis on which discussion of the empirical world can take place. Reality may be one and undifferentiated and the intuition of this may be the pearl of great price. If this is so then obviously all our endeavours should be directed towards the realisation of this state, but apart from this, nothing whatsoever follows about our conduct towards our fellow human beings. It is not so much that non-dualism is antagonistic to the possibility of the moral life as that discussion

of moral issues cannot get started at all so long as we remain within such a framework. It is only by surreptitiously introducing the idea of the 'other' that it does appear possible to consider moral issues.

Contemporary Advaita Ethics

I have argued in the preceding pages that strict non-dualism cannot provide a basis for ethical discussion and that the reason for this is that the absence of an 'other' makes any arguments necessarily inconclusive. This conclusion may be challenged by pointing to a philosopher like, for example, Radhakrishnan, who has both strong moral views and claims that they find their metaphysical justification in non-dualism. It has indeed been claimed that only a non-dualist metaphysics can provide the justification for an ethic of universal love. Will my arguments then hold against the subtler version of non-dualism stated by Radhakrishnan which does provide a specific account of the moral life and insists on its importance?

Radhakrishnan's Ethical Standpoint

There can be no doubt that Radhakrishnan takes with absolute seriousness the importance and significance of the individual person and of the moral life. To quote from only one of his many writings on the subject, he says, 'Human personality is sacred. The human person has a claim to be treated as an end in himself and is therefore entitled to the rights to life, freedom, and security. Freedom to be himself is the right of personality.'[1] On the previous page, in describing the lives of those individuals who have achieved liberation, he says 'Selfish action is not possible for them ..... They are dead to pride, envy and uncharitableness ..... They have ..... simple goodness ..... They are meek, patient, longsuffering ..... Their life is socially minded.'[2]

1 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Fragments of a Confession, from The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, New York, 1952, p.66. 2 Op. Cit. p.65

Liberated persons do not ignore ethical distinctions, but they no longer have to think about them because to do good and act correctly has become second nature to the man who has achieved enlightenment.

The difficulty in Radhakrishnan's ethical position comes in answer to the question of whether it is in fact justified on the basis of non-dualism. I shall try to explain why I think that it is not. My contention is that Radhakrishnan attempts to combine two incompatible positions and that he must choose between abandonning a strict non-dualism, as at times he seems inclined towards, or abandonning the claim that his ethics has a metaphysical basis in ultimate reality.

God And The World

Radhakrishnan distinguishes between different aspects of the supreme and in particular between Brahman, 'Essential, Transcendent Being' and Iswara, 'the Absolute in action as Lord and Creator'.[1] Of God he says that 'the God who is shaping the universe is not the Absolute, free from all relativity, but the active personal being who shares in the life of his finite creatures.'[2] 'God is so intensely concerned with this history that He not only looks on the human life as an interested spectator, but He actively intervenes in it.'[3] The world is meaningful because it is God's world and He responds to every part of it. 'The Supreme is love and knowledge, goodness and power. He is related to everything and everyone in the universe. He responds to everything and to everything's response to Him.'[4]

We have argued that it is only by treating the self as primarily as agent that we can give a satisfactory account of human experience, and by extrapolation, only by giving a theistic account of God as the

1 Ibid. p.39 2 Ibid. p.40 3 Ibid. pp.41-2 4 Ibid. p.42

supreme agent and the world as His action can the meaningfulness of human life be maintained. We find that in this our position agrees with that of Radhakrishnan who emphasises intentional interaction as one of the essential characteristics of God. The point of difference between us lies in Radhakrishnan's view that the moral life and its values, however important in the temporal world, must ultimately be transcended when 'the mortal becomes the immortal and time is taken over into eternity.'[1] However akin to the Christian position Radhakrishnan appears to be in his discussion of God and the world, when he comes to deal with ultimate things his Hindu background is apparent and he asserts that 'The actual fabric of the world with its loves and hates, with its jealousies and competitions, with its unasked helpfulness, sustained intellectual effort and intense moral struggle, are no more than existences dancing on the stillness of Pure Being.'[2]

God And The Absolute

If the cosmic process is to be transcended then the distinction between God and the Absolute becomes important since God is the Absolute in relation to the world. Is God also to be transcended? On this point Radhakrishnan is far from clear and his use of the term 'God' adds to the ambiguity. It is because of his lack of clarity on this issue of the transcendence of the world process that I have contended that he is attempting to combine two incompatible positions and must choose between them.

On the one hand there is evidence that both God and the Absolute are simply different aspects of the Supreme. In discussing the question of whether Isvara, God, is to be regarded as inferior to Brahman, Radhakrishnan appears to repudiate this view and remarks that these

1 Ibid. p.43 2 Ibid. p.44

different aspects 'disclose great depths in the Supreme Being and only logically can we distinguish them. They are all united in the Supreme.'[1] On this showing God is not to be transcended and this view is confirmed when it is later on stated that the values of human life will be 'preserved in the abode of all eternal values, the Absolute-God.'[2] If this is the case, however, can this be regarded as strict non-dualism? Is this the Supreme of which we can only say neti, neti? Insofar as Radhakrishnan distinguishes different aspects of the Supreme his position is little different from that of the theist. It is clear also that it is only by making God an aspect of the Supreme that Radhakrishnan preserves the significance of moral values. In other words, Radhakrishnan recognises clearly that moral values can only be justified on a theistic basis which acknowledges the agency of God, so that only by admitting that the agency of God is as much a part of His Nature as His Pure Being can he maintain the importance of moral values. This means that for Radhakrishnan moral values are not in fact justified on the basis of non-dualism but of theism. This bears out our previous conclusion that strict non-dualism cannot provide a basis for ethical discussion.

Relationship And Solitude

We have already noted that the personal element is fundamental to Christianity in terms of social activity and relationship. By 'personal' God the Christian means a God who is able to enter into personal relationships with his people and to treat them in a 'personal' manner, rather than that God is actually a person.

In contrast, although personal relationship and social activity is given a place in Hinduism, the Advaita view is that these things must ultimately be transcended and give place to a condition in which there is no 'other'. The difference in attitudes on these points is

1 Ibid. p.41 2 Ibid. p.43

brought out clearly by Peter Munz.[1]

Munz argues that the important insight in Hinduism is into solitude and correspondingly the possibility of spiritual self-realisation, whereas the Christian insight is that redemption comes about through relationship and the outworking of absolute and incommensurable love. This agrees with our own findings. The most striking difference in attitude between the two traditions arises over the question of love. While the Hindu recognises the supreme power of love, this recognition is equivocally expressed. Ultimately what is dear to the self is the self, i.e. the self loves the self and this cannot be a genuine relationship. Further, although God's love for man is expressed in in his sending avatars to help them, an avatar does not have the ability to redeem man as has Jesus in the Christian tradition, but can only give a helping hand. This difference is important in relation to moksha the goal of the spiritual life. For the Hindus the love of God is only the means to release rather than a constitutive element in redemption as it is for the Christian. This is the case, even when the path adopted for the attainment of moksha is the bhakti-mārga, the path of loving devotion to God. Bhakti is still only the means to the end and the end itself is to be found in spiritual attainment rather than loving relationship.

The question which arises from the consideration of these two different insights is whether there is any means of reconciling them or whether they must be regarded as mutually exclusive. Munz does not attempt to answer this question though his treatment of the subject suggests that he would favour the incorporation by Christianity of some of the insights of Hinduism rather than the reverse procedure which is that adopted by Hindu writers such as Radhakrishnan.

1 Peter Munz, Relationship and Solitude in Hinduism and Christianity, in Philosophy East and West, Vol. 6, No. 2, July 1956)

Is there any explanation for these different emphases? One possibility is that they represent different answers to the problem of 'existential anxiety'. 'Existential anxiety' may be described as a type of generalised anxiety over life as a whole to which man is prone as a result of his possession of self-consciousness and the power of discursive thought. The power of discursive thought enables man to picture to himself the possible consequences of his actions and future states of affairs, to speculate on the totality of experience and on the interconnection of the different elements in experience. These thoughts may give rise to questions to which no conclusive answer can be given. As a self-conscious being, he may also become aware of a variety and a conflict between the demands made upon him by the social network of family, friends, society, circumstances in which he finds himself. The type of anxiety which may arise in this way can be termed 'existential anxiety' to distinguish it from particular anxieties over particular problems which may be resolved in quite specific ways. By contrast, 'existential anxiety' has no specific solution. Only by adopting a certain general attitude to life can it be relieved. It may be that the different insights of Christianity and Hinduism into relationship and solitude can be understood as different ways of coping with 'existential anxiety'.

In the Hebrew-Christian tradition the dominant attitude has been that of commitment and obedience to a personal God. The 'absolute demand' and 'final succour' of a personal God has been the means whereby the believer has been enabled to sort out his priorities, decide on his values, and be reassured that at the last life has not been lived in vain. Wholehearted devotion to the service of a loving God has resulted in integration of the personality : all other claims are

subordinated to the one requirement of serving God, and this leads to the elimination of anxiety. 'Perfect love casts out fear.'

By contrast, such wholehearted devotion to a supreme, loving God was far more difficult for the thoughtful Hindu. The variety of religious practices and the principle of ista devata, the worship of the god of one's choice was not such as to favour commitment to a single, personal deity. In the absence of a single, supreme being, capable of demanding one's entire devotion some other method of relieving 'existential anxiety' had to be found. The course taken was that of self-knowledge and self-control, leading to a reduction in the level of anxiety.

One of the basic assumptions of Indian religions, Hindu and Buddhist alike, is that human existence involves misery and sorrow. This may be taken in a straight-forward sense as referring to the problems of disease, poverty, climatic conditions and so on. Yet this is not convincing. Life may have been hard, but this by itself does not seem enough to justify its being made the basis of a religious philosophy. Further, there are many aspects of Indian thought which show a very positive appreciation of the joys and good things of life, and the very fact that philosophy was able to reach the heights which it did in ancient India scarcely suggests rock-bottom conditions of existence. It is more plausible to suppose that the sorrow and misery which bothered the Hindu philosophical mind was an existential anxiety, the problem of the meaning of life. This question was answered in the Hebrew tradition by a looking outward to a personal God, in the Hindu tradition it was answered by looking inward to the mind of man. This leads to detailed analyses of every aspect of man's mental existence and to the development of a tradition of yogic practices designed to reduce the level of anxiety and to integrate the personality.

The practice of yoga involves a combination of physical and mental exercises which lead to the ability to control one's thoughts and physical reactions. As well as being able to exclude undesirable thoughts from one's consciousness one becomes able to control undesirable physical reactions such as pain and discomfort. The unshakeable serenity of the yogin comes from the practice of complete mental and physical control. Another feature of the yogic method is the elimination of rational and logical thought. Discursive thought has no place in meditation and instead there is a regression to a state where thought and feeling become one. Since existential anxiety is largely the result of man's propensity to discursive thought which allows him to range so freely over the panorama of existence, it follows that the elimination of discursive thought will also eliminate existential anxiety. The fragmentation of thought gives way to the integration of feeling and a sense of the unity of being and of one's own merging and identity with existence.

The concept of the 'witness self', the detached isolated observer who takes no part in what goes on about him is an implication of this attitude. As increasing control over one's physical and mental processes is obtained, so one increasingly is able to dissociate oneself from them and to experience oneself as something separate and distinct from them.

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding Chapters the emphasis has been on exposition. In the course of this we have encountered various problems. In this final Chapter I attempt to show how some of these problems may be answered by adopting the standpoint of the self as agent.

It is no accident that the bulk of the Chapter is concerned with the question of giving an adequate account of God or the ultimate reality. The account which a religious believer gives of the self or person is dependent on his interpretation of his religious experience and the question of what this experience is and how it should be interpreted is essentially a question of how to describe the highest reality and value.

As I have remarked before, this may seem to some an odd way of proceeding. Would it not be better to start from our ordinary experience of persons and then judge religious experience and its interpretation in the light of this? The answer to this is that there is no reason to assume that an account of the person which takes no account of his religious experience should take priority over an account of the person which treats his religious experience as the determinative factor in his existence. The assumption that we should do this is common only to a small minority, and in any case, the context of the present study is specifically religious.

In the first and largest part of the Chapter I am concerned with the comparative merits of non-dualism and theism as accounts of the ultimate reality. I argue that non-dualist accounts which regard the ultimate reality as indescribable are inadequate, as are theistic accounts which place the main emphasis on God's immutability as a knowing subject.

Only by regarding God as an agent and the world as His act is it possible to do justice to God's transcendence and at the same time give a satisfactory account of the relation between God and the world which maintains the reality and significance of human life.

In the final part of the Chapter I examine some of the implications of regarding the individual person as an agent rather than a knowing subject. I argue that it is only the agency of the person which guarantees unique individuality and significance. Nevertheless, problems remain. An understanding of the self as agent is anchored in the bodily activity of the self and in these terms it is hard to make sense of religious expectations of an after-life in which the identity of the person is preserved in some recognisable form.

'Person' As The Key Metaphysical Concept

One of the tasks of philosophy is to give an account of experience as a whole and to explain the unity which experience has. My contention is that persons create the unity of experience. Any adequate metaphysics, therefore, must give an account of the nature of the person.

Two of the most important constituents of any account of the person are the ethical and the ontological. The completely isolated person is an exception. Normally, people are interdependent in a variety of ways. They affect other people by their actions and are themselves affected by other people's actions. The interaction of people with one another is the field of ethics. Any account of the concept 'person' will have an effect on one's interpretation of the interaction of persons and, therefore, of one's ethical attitudes. It is persons, individually, and jointly, who create the disciplines of science, art, history. Each of these disciplines has its own internal principles of unity, but linking them all is the fact that they all exist for some person or group of

persons. An account of the person is an account of the principle of unity underlying human life.

It is perfectly possible to study these questions without reference to religion but in the context of religion both these issues are brought sharply into focus. Since religion involves man's total response to the world as a whole it is concerned both with his behaviour and with his relationship to the ultimate power and reality of the universe. The concept of the person must therefore occupy a key place in religious thought as the link between its metaphysical position and its practical ethics.

Ethics And Metaphysics In Hinduism And Christianity

One point in which Hinduism and Christianity are in broad agreement is in both subscribing to an ethic of universal love. The exact details do not concern us at the moment : the important thing is the adoption of a this-worldly attitude which values the individual person and seeks his good by co-operation with him. In the case of Hinduism this is a new formulation of the ethical attitude and the task facing contemporary Hindu philosophers has been that of showing that Shankara's traditional non-dualist philosophy was capable of adaption to the claims of a this-worldly social morality rather than an other-worldly asceticism. One of the tasks of the present study has been to ask whether non-dualism can provide a satisfactory justification for personal values or whether this task is better performed by some form of theism. The Christian religion does justify personal values on the basis of theism but it is arguable that the metaphysics of theism have never been adequately stated. Central to this question is the nature of the person for what is taken as essential to the nature of the person cannot have its reality denied at a deeper level. For example, if agency is taken as

essential to the person then it must be shown how individual agents can be integrally related to the larger whole of experience without denying their significance as agents. Likewise, if consciousness be regarded as the essential feature of a person then it must be shown how consciousness qualifies experience as a whole.

Thus the justification of an ethic of universal love raises two important issues : a metaphysical account of the person which shows love to be possible, and a metaphysical account of experience as a whole which maintains the significance of love.

We have noted an overall difference in emphasis between Hinduism and Christianity. Whereas in the former the goal centres on self-realisation with personal encounter treated mainly as a means to that realisation, in Christianity interpersonal relationship and love tend to be seen as ends in themselves. This difference is linked with non-dualism in the one case and theism on the other. Nevertheless, on closer examination we find that there is sufficient similarity in their metaphysical views to make the interchange of ideas between both traditions worthwhile. Each side is faced with similar metaphysical problems concerning the relation of the whole to the part.

Non-Dualism And Theism

Two of the most influential philosophers on the recent Hindu scene have neither of them attempted a metaphysics of theism. Both Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo have put forward a form of non-dualism, but it is significant that each of them has given a prominent place to theistic considerations and have been concerned to refute the view that the doctrine of māyā entails the illusory nature of the world.

The distinctive feature of non-dualism is the belief that it is

impossible in the last resort to conceptualise the real : it is neti, neti, beyond speech and mind. We can only refer to it inadequately by means of symbols, for example, the symbol of theism. Many Christian theologians would agree with this. We can only know God through his works and in relation to us. God as He is in and for Himself must always remain a mystery. Aquinas, for example, says that we cannot come to know what God is (His essence) but only that He is (His existence).

'the divine substance exceeds by its immensity every form which our intellect attains;'[1]

Calvin says of God that

'His essence ..... is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought'[2] and that 'Those ..... who ..... propose to enquire what the essence of God is, only delude us with frigid speculations, - it being much more our interest to know what kind of being God is, and what things are agreeable to his nature ..... What avails it ..... to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?'[3]

As far as this feature of their thought is concerned, Hinduism and Christianity have a great deal in common. The difference lies in other directions such as their account of the way in which the real becomes accessible to human consciousness. Whereas the non-dualist becomes aware of the real primarily through the medium of mystical experience the Christian claims that God has acted in history and is continually encountering mankind through the medium of his total experience, prosaic

1 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, 1, 14; quoted in The Philosophical Texts of Thomas Aquinas, ed. by T. Gilby, O.U.P., 1951.

2 John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, 5.1, transl. by Henry Beveridge, Calvin Translation Society, Edinburgh, 1845.

3 Loc. Cit. 2,2.

or otherwise. (For example, give us this day our daily bread.) While both Hindu non-dualism and Christianity agree that we can speak with confidence concerning God's manifestation in the world, it seems to both that it is presumptious of man to think that he can in any way fathom God's transcendence.

The danger in this view has already been noted in the conflict which may arise between the demands of the religious awareness and the dictates of philosophical analysis. Theism is grounded in the experience of worship in which God is met as one who responds to the worshipper and thus guarantees both the reality of the worshipper and the reality of the values implicit in personal relationship. If, however, philosophical analysis claims to show that reality is not ultimately amenable to interpretation along the lines posited by the theist, then this implies a change in the religious goal. The god of philosophy and of religion must be one and the same. The theist who wishes to justify his particular religious awareness must find a metaphysics which will preserve the ultimacy of persons and personal relationships while it does not impair the transcendency of God. While the non-dualist is happy to see theism as a partial truth and to ground his spiritual experience on the mystical awareness of the non-dual, the theist must beware lest a too great emphasis on God's transcendence should lead to a belittling of what the theist experiences as the revealed personal nature of God.

Although it may seem presumptuous of man to pry too deeply into the mysteries of the Divine Nature or to suppose that by his intellect alone he can fathom the nature of ultimate reality, yet the contrary declaration that the real is utterly beyond the comprehension of man's intellect has its own difficulties. If we are intellectually unable to comprehend the real then why should we think that anything we say about it is true?

Can we even take seriously the statement that it is beyond comprehension? The terms which we use are our own human terms even though they refer to something which itself comprehends rather than is included in human experience. Either these terms have meanings with implications which can be discussed and argued about, or they are meaningless and should be abandoned altogether. There is a basic contradiction involved in a position like that of Aurobindo who assigns the intellect to a comparatively lowly place in the general scheme of things yet who goes on to discuss cosmic entities and supra-intellectual beings quite freely.

The question of whether the real is discussable is of great importance for both Hinduism and Christianity. Both wish, though with different emphases, to affirm a supreme reality behind the world of change and becoming which is the source of any value which this world can have. They are not concerned, as say original Buddhism, with simply putting forward a way of life, but wish to relate their ethical views to a more general metaphysical picture of the way things are. If they have to admit that in the last analysis reality is not amenable to human conceptualisation, then it becomes exceedingly difficult for them to refute alternative viewpoints like atheism, agnosticism or humanism. Neither side will consider grounding faith on preference but hold their beliefs because they consider them to be true. If true, however, there must be ways of showing their truth to the non-believer. Otherwise he can turn round and accuse the religious believers of inconsistency : of criticising the non-believer because his beliefs lack clarity and consistency while ignoring lack of clarity and inconsistency in themselves.

Theists may agree here with the Advaita claim that there is an aspect of the divine which is completely 'other' than us and indescribable in human terms. God may have a significance in and for himself which is

beyond our human comprehension. But this is mere speculation and can have no practical concern for us. The difficulty comes when the Vedāntist claims that this transcendent aspect of Brahman is connected with the ultimate goal of human life. Everything which is connected with human existence and has significance for human life must be able to be referred to in some way. If the concepts we use are confused then they must be clarified. The defender of the faith who wishes to convince others cannot rest his arguments on silence and mystery, though there may well be a place for the acceptance of both in the practice of religious life. His opponents can only too easily turn such an attitude to their own advantage.

Non-Dualism

What are the considerations which lead to the non-dualist affirmation that the real is what is not determined by anything else; and that, therefore, it is beyond speech and mind?

Two factors enter into this. One is connected with the attempt to maintain the absoluteness of reality and the other is connected with the endeavour to do justice to the nature of the religious experience which the non-dualist takes as central to his faith. I shall deal with each of these in turn.

The Absolute

There are various paths by which we arrive at the notion of an ineffable absolute. If object A is determined by object B then A cannot be the whole of reality. Generalising this argument we find that the whole of reality must be something which is not determined by anything else. The parts of reality which we know, however, are always determined by something else and the language which we use to describe reality can make sense only when applied to part of reality. Our concepts, therefore,

are inadequate to describe reality as a whole. Included amongst the things which are determined by other things are people and their actions, from which it follows that agency or personality cannot qualify the world as a whole.

This conception of the absolute is indeed composed of 'bloodless categories'. It is empty of all positive content and it must be so for any positive content would relativize it and make it less than the absolute. It may be characterised as sad cid ananda but these terms cannot be taken in their everyday meaning. It is more aptly described as the undifferentiated One without a second.

This metaphysical account of the absolute traditionally derived its significance for the Vedāntists from the mystical experience which was taken as central and interpreted as the intuition of identity with the supreme Brahman. Mysticism was traditionally accompanied by asceticsm and a turning from the world and metaphysically this was translated into a doctrine of māyā, which viewed the world as illusory.

Mysticism

The ineffability of the mystical experience which is central to Advaita Vedānta is taken to warrant the description neti, neti to Brahman, that which transcends speech and thought. It has been claimed by some Vedāntists and others that all mystical experiences are essentially similar and that on this basis it is possible to construct a 'perennial philosophy' which is the distillation of the essentials of all religions and demonstrates their essential unity. This view implies that it is possible to arrive at a purely phenomenological account of mystical experience which allows of only one metaphysical interpretation. This view has been criticised by Ninian Smart.[1] Smart agrees that all mystical

1 Ninian Smart, Religious Studies, Vol.1, No.1, Oct. 1965, pp.75-87, Interpretation and Mystical Experience.

experiences of the monistic or theistic variety are essentially similar but he argues that the interpretation of mystical experience must depend on other non-mystical considerations. We must distinguish, he says, between the actual experience and its interpretation, but this distinction is not clear cut. This is because the concepts used in describing mystical experiences vary in their degrees of ramification, i.e. in the number of propositions which are presupposed as true by the use of the concept. For example, a description of a mystical experience as 'a cloud of unknowing' has a low degree of ramification, whereas a description as 'union with God' in the context of Christian theism has a high degree of ramification as it presupposes a considerable number of propositions about God, the acceptance of which is not based on mystical grounds, but takes into consideration such varied things as certain historical happenings, the experience of worship and devotion, and so on. This means that

'the higher the degree of ramification, the less is the description guaranteed by the experience itself.'[1]

Further, we must also distinguish between the interpretation which the mystic himself places on his experience and the interpretation which someone from a different tradition could place on it. Both the auto-interpretation and the hetero-interpretation may contain a high degree of ramification and may thus interpret the mystical experience in terms drawn from outside that experience. By making these distinctions and seeking a low auto-interpretation which coincides with a low hetero-interpretation, Smart hopes to facilitate the attempt to arrive at an agreed phenomenological account which will enable experience to be separated from interpretation. The upshot of Smart's argument is that

1 Op. Cit. p.80.

'monistic and theistic experiences are essentially similar ..... it is the correct interpretation of them which is at issue.'[1] and that 'the question of what is the best hetero- and auto-interpretation of mystical experience turns on whether devotion and worship are important. Or more generally : the question of interpretation is the question of God. One cannot answer this by reference to auto-interpretations of mystical experience alone.'[2]

Smart's arguments have far-reaching implications for the Vedāntist's account of religious experience. While he corroborates the Vedāntist's contention that all mystical experiences are fundamentally similar, the conclusion to be drawn from this is uncongenial to the Vedāntist's hopes of a universal religion based on mystical awareness. When we rule out interpretations of mystical experience with a high degree of ramification i.e. which imply propositions which are accepted as true on other than mystical grounds, then we are left with an account of an experience which, it may be generally agreed, is uplifting and even transforming, but which by itself is insufficient basis on which to build metaphysical claims. This is not to say that mystical experience has no value or that it has no part to play in religious life. The significance of mystical experience in the religious life of the individual must be reckoned with, but at the same time it must also be recognised that the doctrinal framework within which the mystical experience is interpreted depends for its acceptance on factors which are not derived from the mystical experience. As Smart puts it the question of the interpretation of mystical experience is the question of God, and it is to this question that we must now turn.

Aurobindo And The Relative

Traditional asceticism and its accompanying account of the world as māyā, illusion, has been repudiated by Aurobindo. It has been replaced by an

1 Ibid. p.85. 2 Ibid.

an emphasis on the reality and significance of empirical life as part of the self-evolution of the absolute. This means that for Aurobindo, the metaphysical concept of the Absolute has ceased to find its prime significance in ascetic mysticism. Mysticism remains central but it is a mysticism which is integrated with and which finds expression in the realities of practical life. Corresponding to this the emphasis has shifted from the undifferentiated Absolute to the differentiated expression of the life of the Absolute ~~in the world~~. As Aurobindo points out, the ancient texts not only say Tat twam asi, 'That thou art', but 'Brahman is this all.' Both aspects of the truth must be incorporated into our account of Brahman. True to his Vedāntic heritage, Aurobindo gives pride of place to the undifferentiated Absolute, but to the dispassionate reader, the Absolute in its differentiated expression is of far greater practical importance.

Inadequacy Of Non-Dualism

Aurobindo's revised account of non-dualist metaphysics is itself an indication of the inadequacy of the traditional version. We have seen that on two of the central issues non-dualism is too vague to provide an adequate basis for a metaphysical account of reality which will maintain the significance of human life and love. On the theoretical side the doctrine of the inconceivability of ultimate reality says nothing definitive and by itself provides no reason for any further assertions about reality. On the practical side, if we accept Smart's arguments, the mystical experience which is central to Hinduism can by itself provide no basis for doctrinal statements. These deficiencies are remedied by Aurobindo by his stress, on the one hand, on the importance of the relative and differentiated aspect of the divine, and on the other, by an expansion in his conception of the goal of human life, which while it continues to make mysticism central, at the same time makes it the pivot

of a full and active life of self-expression and co-operation with others in the Self-expression of the Absolute.

Although superficially this revised non-dualism may seem a far cry from theism, yet when we examine it in more detail we find that some of the important convictions to which it aims to give expression are just the convictions which theism has been traditionally concerned to safeguard and express, and that there is in fact considerable similarity in general direction of thought between some of the important thinkers on both sides. For example, the emphasis on the agency of the divine, on the intentions and purposes of the divine as expressed in the world, on the importance of the individual, not in and for himself, but within the framework of a larger whole, which is both a constitutive factor in his life, and in whose constitution he himself has a part to play. In particular, one of the dominant ideas which finds expression in Aurobindo, and in MacMurray and Hartshorne on the Christian side, is that each individual is a centre of purposeful action, who finds his fulfilment in co-operation with others for the sake of the harmony and purposes of the whole; and whose spiritual growth consists in an increasing appreciation of this fact which leads to an increasing ability to comprehend the whole as something of which he is an integral part, coupled with a greater capacity for sensitive and appropriate interaction with the whole.

Absolute And Relative

We have said that the justification of an ethic of universal love demands a metaphysical account of experience as a whole which will maintain the significance of love. Traditionally interpreted non-dualism will not do this. The exclusion of any genuine differentiation and, therefore, any genuine 'otherness' rules out the possibility of even raising the question

of love. This is not to say that there was no ethical awareness in traditional Hinduism. Far from it. The epics and other literature bear ample testimony to the Hindu awareness of moral issues. In Aurobindo's account of non-dualism, however, his emphasis on the positive and world-affirming aspects of life lead him to stress the manyness and differentiation within the One. Multiplicity is an integral part of the unity of the One.

'We must accept the many-sidedness of the manifestation even while we assert the unity of the Manifested.'[1]

It is only by stressing the many-sidedness and multiplicity of the manifested divine that Aurobindo is able to show the reality of personal values. In other words, only by stressing the relative aspect of the Absolute is a basis found for discussion of all that is characteristically human. This is scarcely surprising. We have already noted that one of the primary objections to theism, i.e. the view which holds that God is personal in nature, is that it relativizes the Divine and so produces an inferior conception. Theism is grounded in the experience of worship and devotion and so must take seriously the existence of an 'other' and the possibility of action. In other words, it must reckon with the relative, Aurobindo balances his synthetic account of human life with a corresponding metaphysical synthesis of the absolute and the relative.

Religion In Search Of A Metaphysics

Any general account of the nature of reality which is to satisfy a religious outlook must satisfy certain conditions. It must adequately represent the object of religious seeking. It must take account of man's life in the world. And it must give a satisfactory account of the relation of the finite to the infinite.

1 Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Calcutta, Arya Publishing House, 1939, p.60.

These problems are faced by both Hinduism and Christianity. It is my contention that there is a greater similarity in their metaphysical positions than might at first sight appear, and that in their current development they are faced with similar problems which demand similar answers.

Any ultimate object of religious attention must be thought of as that than which no greater can be conceived. Both religions are in substantial agreement over the transcendence of God or the Absolute, although they differ in the way in which they emphasise this transcendence. God or the Absolute must be more than the world and other than the world.

In the West the philosophical question of transcendence finds its origins in Plato and the theory of forms. The divine forms transcended the particular instances of which they were the forms. The question of how exactly the instances were related to their forms was fraught with difficulties, but the popular understanding of the relationship was that in some way the particular instances were images or copies of the corresponding form. This understanding is reinforced by Plato's passage in the Timaeus in which he speaks of time as a 'moving image of eternity'. The world of becoming is an image of the world of being. This same understanding is repeated in Aquinas' account of the divine nature and the doctrine of analogy. What we affirm of the divine nature is not to be understood as applying univocally to both God and creatures. On the other hand, the terms which we use are neither equivocal nor meaningless. The creatures, as effects of God, manifest him imperfectly and therefore the terms are used analogically. The foundation of this analogical use of concepts is the likeness of the creatures to God and not simply that God is their cause. Transcendence in this instance has meant not a complete

negation of all human qualities, but the attempt to understand a greater and more perfect expression of the best of human qualities. Although this has been the main emphasis in the Christian account of the transcendence of God, the view of transcendence as complete 'otherness' has not been neglected. We have already referred to Calvin's statement that God's essence is 'incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought'. In Christian thought the recognition of this aspect of transcendence has been coloured by the remembrance that man is made 'in God's image'.

In contrast, the Vedāntic account of the transcendence of the Absolute has its roots in neti, neti - the absolute is inconceivable. Everything to which we point must be negated in order to arrive at the intuition of Brahman. It is from this standpoint that Aurobindo criticises the Western conception of God as antropomorphic and inadequate. Aurobindo's understanding of the Western tradition on this issue, however, is itself inadequate as it fails to take account of the doctrine of analogy and the way in which this doctrine conceives of God as more than man. Indeed there are places in the Hindu account of the Absolute where some form of doctrine of analogy seems called for, or even directly implied. The designation of Brahman as sad cid anandam immediately springs to mind. We have already noted the difficulty which Shankara experiences in explaining how these human terms may be applied to nirguna Brahman. Sad cid anandam is the heart of Vedāntism. It is the application of these terms to Brahman which prevents the Vedāntic account of the transcendence of the Absolute from lapsing into meaninglessness or a mystery which is indifferent to any kind of behaviour. Yet what are we to understand by these terms? It is the ascription of being, consciousness and bliss to Brahman which gives the goal of identity

with Brahman its human interest. Yet the being, consciousness and bliss which are Brahman's cannot be identical with the limited and imperfect being, consciousness and bliss which is our experience as human beings. The only kind of answer to this which preserves the meaning of the terms seems to be to say that our being, consciousness and bliss are limited and imperfect copies of the absolute being, consciousness and bliss. This is not to say that what is called the analogical use of concepts is clear or perfectly comprehensible, but only that the Hindu teaching on this point seems to demand this sort of analysis. If this analysis is given, however, it is tantamount to the admission of a 'personal' element in the Absolute. There may be differences of opinions over the details, but so long as the admission is made that the terms sad cid anandem are meaningfully applied to the transcendent Brahman, then there is a substantial amount of agreement between Vedāntists and Christians on the question of transcendence. Again, this is not to say that either side have produced an adequate analysis of the transcendence of God or Brahman.

At the opposite pole to God's transcendence is His immanence. God is greater than the world but He is also present in the world. Or to use the Hindu statement, All this is Brahman. The accounts which each tradition gives of the divine immanence in the world are complementary to their accounts of the divine transcendence.

The Christian account of divine transcendence emphasised that the human was an imperfect copy of the divine and implicitly that the divine was different from and other than the human. The account of divine immanence expresses itself in two forms : in the belief in the 'great chain of being' and the doctrine of encounter, corresponding to the Greek and Hebrew elements in the Christian conception of God. Leibniz' doctrine can be taken as a representative expression of the former belief. The

world is the best possible because it is the best possible combination of the infinite potentialities inherent in the divine nature. The world is composed of monads. Each monad exmplifies in its own nature a facet of the divine nature and each monad, as well as being in itself the focus for some particular characteristic, reflects in itself the nature of the totality of the other monads which constitute the world. Here again in this account of the immanence of the divine there is a likeness of the human to the divine in that each human monad reflects imperfectly the totality of the divine. The difficulty in this account of divine immanence, which Leibniz does not escape, is that in positing the realisation of all possible compatible potentialities within the divine nature no room is left for development of human effort. The other expression of the immanence of God is in the doctrine of encounter. The belief that God is encountered in the history of the world is a distinctive feature of the Christian faith. It is more than the recognition of God as the creator and sustainer of the world, a belief which is recognised in the doctrine of the 'great chain of being' : it is the conviction that in certain historical events God has manifested himself in a unique manner. Linked with this is the belief that God is one with whom we stand in personal relationship, and that we become aware of God's presence in the world in terms which are most aptly described as a personal encounter. This account of divine immanence is in line with the preceding account of divine transcendence. Both recognise that there is a likeness between the human and the divine, a likeness in which the human is an imperfect copy of the divine; it is on the basis of this likeness that there can be a coming-together of the human and the divine.

Again Aurobindo has criticised the Western account of the immanence of God because it lacks spirituality. It is conceived too much in human terms.

We can reply that any account must use human terms, and to negate the personal aspect of human experience in describing the immanence of the divine is to risk making the divine sub-human rather than super-human. Divine immanence has been conceived along different lines in Hinduism but we must admit the validity of the analogy of personal encounter.

In any human relationship there is an element of both transcendence and immanence. There is a part of the other person which presents itself to us and there is a part that stands over against us and, as it were, hides itself from us. This latter element is more than simply the aspects of the other person of which we are not currently aware. The totality of these aspects, which together constitute the life-history of the person, make up that person's immanence. They express the nature of the person and enable us to know that person. The life-history of a person, however, taken in itself is incomplete without reference to what I have termed the transcendent element: transcendence and immanence are complementary notions. The transcendent element is the nature or character of the person which is expressed in his external actions.

It may be said that there is no other way of understanding the character of a person other than in terms of his actions so that to think of a person's character as something different from his actions is to revive the mistake of thinking that there is a ghost in the machine. This is not so, however. Unless a person's nature or character is thought of as something which transcends his actions, and is therefore something other than the sum of his actions, the very notion of action becomes meaningless. Action presupposes choice and therefore the possibility that we could always have acted otherwise.

That we must choose to do an action has at least two implications. It implies, as we have noted, that there are a variety of possibilities open to us. It also implies that in choosing, we have a reason for our choice. In acting, therefore, we are expressing ourselves in one way out of a variety of possible ways, and also we are expressing a character which could have been given expression in other possible ways. This means that the possibility of action implies that there is an agent who transcends the expression of his character in his actions.

A person's transcendence is linked with his ability to make decisions, and hence with his potentialities, expressed or unexpressed. The more fully developed a person is, the greater his transcendence. Although both transcendence and immanence increase together in the development of a person, there is a sense in which they are also in inverse proportion to each other. At one end of the scale we could put the baby, whose self-awareness is minimal; at the other end, a fully-developed person who is aware that his life expresses only one of its many possibilities. In the latter example, transcendence exceeds immanence whereas in the former, it is immanence which predominates.

A baby is almost all immanence. His being lies open to the other, his mother, in this instance. A baby, in fact, may be regarded at birth as being completely the expression of his parents. He has as yet no personality in and for himself. This is something which is only developed as a result of the behaviour of the mother, and to a lesser degree the rest of the environment towards the child. (Some qualification may be necessary here. The extent to which a baby expresses any personality at birth is a matter of debate. Since, in the terms of my argument, immanence and transcendence are complementary ideas, it is not logically possible to regard the baby at birth as

completely lacking any transcendent element, since without the transcendent element it would not be possible to regard what the baby manifests as immanence.) The mother behaves towards the child in such a way that the child is encouraged to initiate activity and to make decisions for himself. She evokes a response from the child and initiates the basic personal relationship with the world within which the child will grow up to be a person in his own right. While in one sense the child does not cease to be his parents' child and thus a part of their self-expression, he also begins to express his own nature and to develop his own transcendence. His immanence is the expression of his nature in terms of his activities in the world, while his transcendence is his character and the potentialities of his nature which may or may not be expressed in action.

The notion of potentiality requires further explanation. A distinction must be made between the potentialities of a baby and the potentialities of a mature person. It is the latter which is linked to the idea of transcendence. In the baby's case, it may seem that potentiality is at its maximum. His whole life stretches ahead, apparently unlimited in its scope. The grown man, on the other hand, has encountered circumstances and formed habit patterns which have set a limit to his initial potential. Yet it is the self-awareness of this limited potential that is relevant to the notion of transcendence rather than the unlimited abstract possibilities of the baby. The baby's transcendence is minimal because his actual ability to make choices and initiate action is minimal. As he matures his ability to express himself increases, and his activities become a more complete expression of his character. He becomes more self-aware of his potentialities and of his ability to translate potentiality into action.

The complementary notions of transcendence and immanence are parallelled by the distinctions absolute and relative, independent and dependent.

Transcendence tends towards absoluteness and independence, whereas immanence tends towards relativity and dependence. The transcendence of a person includes his character and we admire a person the more he is independent of circumstances in his character and wills to do the right in all situations. On the other hand, while the will to do right should be absolute, the question of what is the right action in particular circumstances is relative and varies with the variety in the circumstances. Again, the maturity of a person is exhibited in his sensitivity to the different circumstances which he meets, which shows itself in the fitness of his response to these circumstances. Thus the more sensitive he becomes the more his actions will be relative, but the more they will be suitable to the situation and at the same time a true expression of the man's character.

These lines of argument and suggestions are not new. They have been developed by, for example, John MacMurray and by Charles Hartshorne in the books already referred to. In Chapter 1, we quoted a passage from MacMurray which sums up these thoughts : 'The more universal a person becomes in his self-transcendence, the more unique does he become in his individuality.' In terms of this analysis it becomes possible to give a meaningful account of the Christian interpretation of God's relation to the world in His transcendence and immanence.

God is both transcendent and immanent. This means that He must be both absolute and relative. He must be absolute in his character and relative in the expression of it. No greater than God can be conceived because God is supreme in His absoluteness and in His relativity in a

way that no human person can ever be. His will is unshakeably good while the expression of this will shows God's infinite sensitivity in meeting the need of each particular situation. The relation of man to God is similar to the relation of the baby to his mother. As the baby may be regarded as the self-expression of the mother so man is part of the self-expression of God. He is a part of God's immanence and can rightly say that in God 'we live and move and have our being'. There is no part of the world or of human life which is excluded from God : it is all a part of God. But this does not mean that man is a cipher, a puppet manipulated by an all-inclusive fate. As the mother by her actions towards the baby develops the baby's transcendence and so leads him to the point of decision-making for himself, and ultimately the possibility of fulfilling himself in terms of a personal relationship, so God acts towards man in such a way that man can initiate action for himself, and in other words, have freewill. This means that traditional queries regarding the omnipotence and goodness of God are based on a misunderstanding regarding the relation of God to the world. We cannot regard God as being responsible for everything in the world, but must recognise what is the consequence of man's actions and therefore man's responsibility. In God we live and move and have our being, but the very fact that we can make such a statement implies that we can separate ourselves from our environment and so transcend our sheer givenness. A corollary of this analysis is that as one end of a personal relationship lies in the mutual pleasure of the participants in the relationship, so one end of the relationship of God and man is in their mutual pleasure. This means that man can add to the measure of God's enjoyment, and that service to God is not simply for the benefit of man because God, by definition, cannot be bettered in any way; but service to God does benefit God and add to His enjoyment of Himself.

In the light of this interpretation of Christian thought it is interesting to turn to a Hindu thinker like Aurobindo and find many similar ideas expressed. Aurobindo, as we have seen, criticises traditional Hindu asceticism and turning away from the world, and points out that the text, All this is Brahman, has equal validity. This expresses the immanence of Brahman. The Vedāntic interpretation of the immanence of the divine is not in terms of encounter but of identity. Whereas the tendency of the Christian worship of God is to the experiencing of nature as something alien to man, the Hindu point of view leads to man feeling himself to be part of the great cosmic harmony and himself akin to the whole of nature. This finds expression in several ways. The traditional set-up of Hindu society was regarded as the expression of the cosmic harmony in which each member plays his necessary part. In a different context the equation of Ātman and Brahman can be understood as the affirmation of the Absolute as the essence of being in this world.

In Aurobindo the notion of the immanence of the Absolute in the world takes a new turn and is developed in terms of the ideas of relativity and dependence. While the absolute transcendence of nirguna Brahman is insisted on, it is recognised that there must be an aspect of Brahman which is relative and therefore variable and which is capable of self-development. This aspect of Brahman is no less real than the absolute aspect and in fact the two are complementary. The concept of evolution is applied. Brahman descends into the world and the world ascends to Brahman. The unchanging eternal Brahman is real but so also is the evolving world and of equal importance as an aspect of Brahman. The concept of progress in the moral and spiritual sphere is linked to that of evolution, and the reality of both ideas is reinforced by Aurobindo's repudiation of the traditional Hindu view of time as cyclical. If time

is cyclical there can be no real progress, and liberation must lie in the complete transcendence of time. But if time has a genuine part to play in the self-development of the absolute then our liberation must be linked to our temporal existence, and the liberated man, like Brahman himself, has both a temporal and an eternal aspect. The emphasis on the reality of time gives the traditional notion of the dependence of the world on God a new turn. As we have noted, both Shankara and Rāmānuja were anxious to insist that, although the world was dependent on Brahman, Brahman was himself independent of the world and unaffected by it. If the world in its temporality is equally an aspect of Brahman, however, then we can no longer hold to the view that it has no effect on Brahman. On the contrary, if the world is the self-development and self-expression of Brahman then the spiritual development of man directly aids the self-expression of Brahman and contributes its share to the divine fulness and bliss. This is of great importance in the motivation of moral and social endeavour. Self-interest cannot be the ultimate motive of the spiritual life but rather the desire to co-operate with, and to participate in the self-expression of the divine nature.

Towards An Adequate Account Of The Divine Nature

Both religions wish to found their metaphysics on a single all-inclusive reality which both transcends the world but of which the world is an expression. The prime problem which each faces at the present time is that of conceptualising the way in which the world is contained in God in such a way that the reality of the world with its strivings is maintained without thereby jeopardising the absoluteness and supremacy of the divine. The direction in which the solution of this problem lies involves both sides in a reappraisal of the relative side of the divine nature. The relative, with its multiplicity is just as much a real part of the divine nature as is its absolute unity. Aurobindo says,

'We must accept the many-sidedness of the manifestation even while we assert the unity of the Manifested.'

This recognition of the reality of the manifestation of the divine issues in a realisation that to affirm solely the immutability of the absolute is to have a less than absolute conception, and that the absolute must also contain an absolute mutability.

'It is "Absolute" in the sense of being entirely free to include and arrange in Its own way all possible terms of Its self-expression.'[2]

It is my contention that this account of the divine nature which is suggested by both Hindu and Christian writers is an account which portrays the divine nature as essentially 'personal'.

Summing Up

Both Hinduism and Christianity hold that experience has an over-all unity which is constituted by the supreme object of religion, Brahman in the one case and God in the other. This faces them with several problems in common. One problem is that of giving an account of Brahman or God which will maintain His absolute supremacy and transcendence and yet leave room for His relationship to the world. This leads to the second problem, that of relating the infinite to the finite, the absolute to the relative. And finally, they need to give an account of human life which will maintain its significance and the significance of the individual participants.

I have argued that the traditional approaches to these questions are inadequate on both sides and that the most promising way of reaching satisfactory answers is to conceive of God or Brahman as personal and the unity of the world and God as a personal unity. It is one thing, however, to say that it is persons who create the unity of experience and persons for whom religion can provide a goal in life, and another thing to say what is meant by persons and the personal element which is vital

1 The Life Divine, p.60. 2 Ibid. p.60.

in human experience. My contention has been that it is only by recognising that agency is central to being a person and standing in a personal relationship that we can arrive at an account of what it is to have personal characteristics, which is adequate both to meet the demands of ordinary experience, and also to provide a satisfactory religious metaphysics where such a metaphysics is demanded, as it is by both Hinduism and Christianity.

In Christianity it has always been recognised that the worshipper stands in personal relationship with his God, but the understanding of the concept of 'person' has varied. On the one hand, 'person' has been understood as a self-sufficient, rational being and on the other, as a centre of voluntary, intentional social activity. The former conception has been the mainstay of Christian metaphysics to its detriment. By emphasising the self-sufficiency and immutability of the divine nature it fails to explain why the world exists and why God should have concern for the world. Thus the relationship between God and the world is not adequately stated and their basic unity is in danger of falling apart. Finally, by conceiving of the person as primarily a knower rather than an agent it effectively removes him from the real world of action by making the existence of the 'other' problematical. These deficiencies have been pointed out by MacMurray, Hartshorne and others. The remedy is not to reject completely the account of a person as a self-sufficient rational being, but to subordinate this aspect to the practical, concrete element of voluntary social activity. To do this is to recognise that God has a relative aspect as well as an absolute character, and the recognition of God's relativity in no way detracts from His greatness.

We have argued that the relativity and absoluteness of God can be conceived of as human absoluteness and relativity carried to their limits.

The human is an imperfect approximation to the divine. In the same way, the transcendence and immanence found in human persons may be conceived as perfectly expressed in the divine nature. This line of thought enables us to give an account of God which includes the world, yet which allows a real element of independence to man's action in the world.

In Hinduism the element of personal encounter has tended to be subordinated to an 'impersonal' goal, the realisation of the Ātman/Brahman identification. When it comes to recent exponents of Hinduism such as Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan, however, their insistence on the impersonality of the religious goal seems more a matter of words than of substance.

Our criticism of Shankara has been that in his efforts to safeguard the transcendence of Brahman he has adopted a position which makes it impossible to give an adequate account of the empirical world. If nirguna Brahman is beyond speech and thought then there is no way of relating Brahman significantly to the world, and with the addition of the premiss that nirguna Brahman is the ultimate reality and power, the world must be regarded as an illusion to be negated and transcended in the realisation of Brahman. We have argued that the interpretation of Brahman's transcendence as neti, neti, 'not this, not this,' must be rejected. If the world and Brahman are to be meaningfully related and if the religious goal is to be significantly described, then it must be possible to give an account of Brahman in human terms. We have seen that in fact Shankara does attempt to relate nirguna Brahman to human experience by using the terms sad cid ananta to refer to Brahman, albeit with the qualification that these terms are not to be understood in their usual sense, but must be applied to Brahman without the limitations involved in their use in referring to human experience. This expedient, however, has similarity

to the Christian doctrine of analogy in referring to God. Both agree that certain human terms may be used to refer to the nature of God or Brahman though these terms are not to be understood as being either univocally applied nor yet sheer equivocation. This admission on Shankara's part reduces the gap between the Christian and Hindu conceptions of God so that it becomes possible, if we accept Boethius' definition of a person as a self-subsistent entity of a rational nature, to apply this definition to Shankara's nirguna Brahman. On this reading, Shankara's Brahman becomes 'personal' in nature and the difference between Christian and Hindu doctrine becomes largely a matter of words.

We have, however, rejected such an account of the 'personal' nature of God. Instead of the standpoint of a self-subsistent knowing self we have adopted the position of an agent whose being can only be fully realised in interaction with others. We have argued that it is only the latter account of 'person' which will enable both an adequate account of the nature of God as personal to be given, and also an account of the world which will preserve its significance and value. The recognition of the agency of the self involves the admission of relativity in the self, and applied to God, recognises that there is a relative aspect to his nature. The relativity of the self is the self in action and is also the immanence of the self. We have argued that the conception of the person as an agent rather than a knower brings together the concepts of transcendence and immanence and that, applied to God, enables an account of the relation of God to the world to be given which maintains the transcendence and absoluteness of God, and at the same time accounts for the world of becoming and the relative independence of human persons.

When we turn to the thought of Aurobindo we find a reappraisal and

reassessment of the relative and immanent aspects of Brahman. I have tried to show that this implies an account of Brahman's nature which can only be termed 'personal'.

The adoption of this account of 'person' raises several questions which we must now attempt to answer.

Objections

One of the main objections to conceiving of God or Brahman as personal is that personal life as we experience it is always within an environment. It is difficult, if not impossible, to give meaning to the idea of personal life out of relation to something which is other than the person or individual whose life it is. Personal life is constituted by interaction, direct or indirect, with something which is other than ourselves. If God is personal this seems to imply that He too needs an environment and that therefore there must be something other than, and co-existent with, God. If there is something other than God which co-exists with Him, this implies that God must be less than the Absolute since the Absolute 'has nothing which is not included in it in every possible sense of the word.'[1] A corollary of this is that if God interacts with an environment then He must be subject to change and, therefore, less than perfect. Also, interaction with an environment implies that God's life is in time and not eternal as traditionally conceived.

My contention in answer to these objections is that without an environment we can give no account of God which will genuinely relate Him to the world and so provide a possible human goal. The problem is to explain how the environment of God can be both created by Him and yet

1 S. Radhakrishnan, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Allen & Unwin, 1936 p.283.

independent of Him. I have tried to show that personal relationships provide us with a formal model which maintains both the transcendence and immanence of God. The idea of the world as the act of God allows both for the otherness of the world from God while yet making the world totally dependent on God for its being.

We have already referred to W.C. Kneale's discussion of the incoherence of the doctrine of timeless life. We cannot make sense of a life which does not involve incidents in time, or intelligent life which is not aware of the passage of time. To attribute timeless life to God is to remove Him from the arena of human action and from involvement in affairs. Yet the specific actions of God in the world are fundamental to the Christian understanding of history. To suppose that God does interact with the world is to imply that He is subject to change, but this does not mean that He must be less than perfect. God's interaction with the world is the expression of His relativity, and His responses to the world must be supposed to be always perfectly appropriate to the situation, unlike our human responses which are limited and often misguided.

Only by incorporating an element of change into God Himself can the values encountered in the changing world be maintained. Otherwise we are faced with the problem of how a timeless eternal being can be the cause of a changing finite world and Shankara's illusionism becomes the only plausible answer.

Charles Hartshorne discusses the way in which God may be supposed to change while yet remaining absolute.[1] He considers the implication of describing God as 'unsurpassable by another', one of the traditional ways of describing God. It has generally been argued that this definition

1 'Abstract and Concrete Approaches to Deity', Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol.XX. No.3. (March 1965). The Divine Relativity, Yale University Press, 1948.

of God implies that He is immutable in the sense of being absolutely unsurpassable. There can be none greater than God. Hartshorne points out that while it is essential to God's nature that he should not be surpassable by any other, there is no reason why he should not be continually surpassing Himself. If we allow that God is strictly all-surpassing in this way, then we must suppose that in some sense He has a past and a future.

The admission that God can have a past and a future has been unwelcome, since if God exists in time, this seems to imply that his existence is subject to the contingency which affects other temporal beings, and theologians have traditionally wished to attribute necessity to God's existence. The supposition that God might not have existed is curious, to say the least : if God exists, his existence must be necessary. This is certainly a problem to which the answer would seem to be to remove God's existence from time and treat it as eternal. Yet as we have seen, this move creates even greater difficulties when we come to give an account of the relation of God to the world. Only by admitting change, and therefore temporality in God is it possible to give an account of the relation of the world to God in such a way as to maintain the significance of the world.

Hartshorne in the article referred to above develops the notion of the unsurpassability of God in terms of his interaction with His creatures. He argues that as human beings are individuals who interact with and influence each other in encounter, a characteristic which is surpassable in all of us, and since God is described as unsurpassable, we get, by contrast,

'the idea of an individual interacting with others, not for a time but always, not with some, but with ideal wisdom, not with a mixture of love,

hate and indifference, but with unsurpassable love for all.'[1]

This leads us to a conception of God as

'the unique because unsurpassable individual ..... interacting with all others, relevant to all contexts, and in this sense absolutely universal .....'[2]

If God interacts with His creatures, this implies that He is aware of them and affected by them. He is unsurpassably responsive to them because He is unsurpassably aware of their needs.

If we admit that temporality and change are not synonymous with imperfection then the sting is taken from Radhakrishnan's criticism. We can agree that 'God depends on creation even as creation depends on God.'[3] But this does not mean that God is less than the Absolute. On the contrary, God's absolute nature is a part of God Himself, who in His creation is always surpassing Himself and expressing His infinite relativity which finds expression in intentional interaction with his own creation.

I have been concerned in this first part of the Chapter to argue that any adequate account of God or the Absolute Reality which has a meaningful content such that it can provide the goal and motivation for human life, and which can provide a satisfactory analysis of the relation between the infinite and the finite, must conceive of God as personal and of the relation between God and the world as a personal relationship. I have tried to show that serious thinkers in both Hinduism and Christianity are tending to think along these lines and to make the concepts of agency and intentional interaction central in their thinking about ultimate reality. It remains to consider the implications of these lines of thought on the conception of the personal as exhibited in the account of the individual self and in the account of the goal of human life as conceived by Hinduism and Christianity.

1 Op. Cit. p.267. 2 Ibid. 3 Op. Cit. p.283.

The Differentiae Of The Personal

In Chapter Three we saw that both Shankara and Ramānuja, representing the non-dualist and theistic aspects of Hinduism, considered that thought, consciousness or self-awareness, various translations of the same idea, was the distinctive element in man. We compared this to the concept of rationality which plays a similar role in Western thought. Both ideas refer to an awareness and intentionality in human experience. There are, however, certain important differences. Whereas rationality is something distinctively human which separates man from the rest of creation, cit or consciousness is something which is manifested throughout the universe.

This is brought out by Deussen when he defines cit or caitanyam as

'a potency which lies at the root of all motion and change in nature, which is therefore also ascribed, for example, to plants, and means thus rather the capacity of reaction to outer influences, a potency which in its highest development reveals itself as human intelligence, as spirit.'[1]

This means that the realisation of one's essential being as cit, consciousness, is accompanied by the realisation of one's essential oneness with the rest of the universe. The implication of this is that cit is an impersonal power or reality in the sense that it is not the sole prerogrative of the human race nor of individual persons. On the other hand, it must be recognised that the idea of consciousness manifesting itself in the universe in varying and increasing degrees is not found only in Hinduism, but also in the West in the writings of philosophers who are avowed theists. Leibniz's petits perceptions and Hegel's dialectic of reason are two major examples. (There are, of course, important commentators on Hegel, for example, Professor Findlay, who interprets him in non-theistic terms.) We, therefore, have an apparently

1 Deussen's System of the Vedānta, p.59, quoted by S. Radhakrishnan, History of Indian Philosophy, p.532, fn.

anomlous situation in both traditions where on the one hand it is asserted that God is personal, meaning amongst other things that He cares for the individual, and on the other hand, that the essence of the individual is an impersonal something of which it does not make sense to talk of its responding to God's care. Here it is non-dualism which gives the more logical answer in asserting that persons as we understand them are not ultimate, and the reality of human life and of the rest of the universe is more aptly described in impersonal terms.

The ideal man of traditional Hindu thought is the sthitaprajña, the man of steady understanding. This is the man who views life dispassionately, who is unmoved by what he sees and experiences, who acts without desire for the fruit of his actions. From the philosophical point of view this is linked with the concept of the sākshin, or witness self which describes the self as essentially a knower. This means that the essence of his being lies outside the world which for him is only an object of contemplation. It is acknowledged that the self must act but the force of this acknowledgement is taken away by the insistence that he must not allow himself to become emotionally involved with the consequences of his action. In other words, he must act without a motive and in doing so treat his actions, not as actions but as events. He must not identify himself with his actions and think that he is bringing about some change in the world, but he must experience both the bodily expression of his actions and their consequent effects in the world as events which are simply happening around him and of which he is the unmoved spectator. In this ideal of human life, we have a concept which is essentially impersonal, i.e. in which the individual is not important for his own sake but only as a representative of his kind, and consequently which regards each individual as essentially similar.

MacMurray's analysis of the standpoint of the self as knower may be

applied to the concept of the witness-self. If thought or intelligence is the characteristic of the self then this must be the same for all. So long as we are all thinking correctly all our thoughts must be identical. Whereas in the West solipsism has been an inevitable problem this is not so for Shankara. He starts from the presupposition of the identity of all selves.

It might be questioned, however, whether a solipsistic conclusion is inevitable. Supposing that thought or intelligence is the characteristic of the self, with its implication that when we are thinking correctly all our thoughts are identical, would it not be possible to have numerically different episodes of thought which were identical? If this is possible then we can still insist on the reality of the individual selves and resist Shankara's conclusion that all selves are identical with the one universal Self. This is, in fact, Rāmānuja's position. He insists that there is a plurality of selves, all of whom have consciousness as their principle attribute. This means that when they are all thinking correctly and so exhibiting their true nature, there must be a number of numerically different, yet identical, episodes of thought.

Logically there can be no objections to this conclusion so long as one has abandoned the principle of identity of indiscernibles, and the case for or against this principle would have to be argued separately. From the practical point of view, however, there are insuperable difficulties and these in Rāmānuja's case mean that in the end he is unable to reconcile his religious convictions with his philosophic assumptions.

The very notion of a plurality of selves implies a corresponding plurality of qualitative differences which is denied in the assumption of numerically different, yet identical episodes of thought. Although it

is the same world which is experienced by different selves, one of the features which distinguishes my experience of the world from your experience of it, and thus derivatively, myself from your self, is the fact that we experience the same world from different points of view. What I make of the world, though similar in important ways to your experience, is yet different from what you make of the world. If we are to regard both experiences as identical, since they are experienced by identical subjects, the point of insisting on the ultimate importance and significance of the individual 'I' seems to be lost. One might reply that from 'my' point of view, since I cannot have any direct experience of other knowing subjects, the only important 'I' is myself, and I can be aware of my significance of other possible 'Is', purely from a consideration of my own experience. This will not do, however. As a conscious subject, the 'I' of which I am aware has no positive content. Such an 'I' cannot provide me with the uniqueness which guarantees my significance and still less can it provide me with a reason for generalising to the significance of other identical 'Is'. If I am faced with the possibility of a number of selves identical with my self, then the natural conclusion to draw is that somehow they are all the one self.

Rāmānuja's insistence on the reality of the individual selves stems from his religious convictions, and these are based on his experience of worship and hence of the relation of the worshipper to the supreme reality. The 'I' which the religious consciousness takes seriously is an 'I' which is unique in its action on and interaction with the world. But the 'I' which is implied in the standpoint of the knowing subject is empty of content. As such it can never justify the existence of a plurality of unique selves and therefore can never be regarded as an adequate explication of the 'I' of the religious conscousness.

We have seen, then, that there has been a similar philosophical development in each tradition in that each has adopted the standpoint of the self as subject for whom the world is primarily an object of contemplation. I have tried to show that this has led to difficulties on the Christian side in so far as its consequences have clashed with other assumptions implicit in theism. Within the framework of non-dualism, however, it has been possible to develop the standpoint of the self as thinker to its logical conclusions and this has resulted in an analysis of the self which divests it of all positive content.

Rāmānuja

We have seen that there is a conflict within Christian theism between the position which stresses the importance and ultimacy of the individual person, and the philosophical standpoint of the 'I think' which cannot account for a plurality of individual selves. Is there a similar contradiction in Rāmānuja's thought? We have seen that he stresses that the self is primarily an agent but we must ask whether the implications of this assertion are fully worked out or whether the basic background of non-dualism finally wins the day.

Rāmānuja's starting point is a revulsion against the implications of non-dualism, which he sees as denying the significance of the individual life and as being unable to provide a satisfactory aim for human life. What is the point of liberation if 'I' will not be around to experience it? Such a goal can have no meaning for me. This means that Rāmānuja must safeguard the ultimacy of the individual, and he does this, as we have seen, by asserting that individuals are parts of God rather than identical with God, and by insisting that the selves are acting subjects of whom consciousness is the principle attribute rather than pure consciousness. Rāmānuja insists that the 'I' is ultimate as a permanent, conscious subject, for if this were not the case, release could have no meaning.

If each individual 'I' is ultimate, however, there must be some means of distinguishing between different 'Is'. On the empirical level we distinguish between different people on the basis of their different life histories, i.e. by means of the varying patterns of empirical features which make up their life. This implies that the basis of the distinction lies in the different choices of action which constitute a life. If I speak then of liberation as 'I' experience it, or hope to experience it, my understanding of the 'I' cannot be separated from my understanding of the past sequence of actions and events which go to make up 'my' life. Does Rāmānuja's account of the nature of the individual self allow for an understanding of 'my' liberation along these lines? The answer is no. By making consciousness the essence of the self, Rāmānuja provides no means of differentiating between selves. So far as each self possesses consciousness fully it is identical with every other self. Rāmānuja wishes to ensure the ultimacy of individual persons, but his analysis of the nature of the self does not depart sufficiently from the basic non-dualist standpoint to do this adequately. So long as thought or consciousness is regarded as the fundamental characteristic of the self then the logical conclusion is that there can be only one self. To deny this conclusion it is not enough simply to assert the reality of a plurality of selves : we must adopt a radically different analysis. This new analysis starts from the standpoint of the self as agent.

The Self As Agent

We have argued that the notions of pure thought or pure awareness are unintelligible. We cannot understand thought without a thinker or an object of thought and we cannot understand awareness without there being something which is aware and something to be aware of. Also, thought and awareness make no sense except in the context of the passage of time.

Further, the notions of thought and awareness, even when given significance by being anchored to the thought and awareness of someone, are still only comprehensible when understood as the negative aspect of action. Action is first and foremost the determination of the world which involves thought, whereas thought can only be the contemplation of that which is already determined. Action as that which determines the world is the source of the differentiation amongst persons, whereas thought which comprises what has already been determined, must, insofar as it is correct, be the same for all. My contention has been that agency must be regarded as the differentia of the personal, and that it is only by considering the self as an agent that a true understanding of personal relationship can be achieved, and also a true understanding of what the theist takes to be the relation of God to the world.

I have endeavoured to develop these ideas in the preceding sections. There I argued that action exhibited both the transcendence and immanence of the self and that it was possible to conceive of an agent who was both transcendent and immanent in a supreme degree; and that this agent was God.

Because each action is a unique determination of the world, the history of the actions of each person provide a means of distinguishing him from all other persons and ensure his unique individuality. Because action involves not only the self but also the 'other', an understanding of action enables us to understand the unity of the world and the integral relationship which each person has to the rest of the world. The 'other' is integral to me because it provides the medium in which I express myself; but this is not a one-way traffic as my actions are also influenced by my understanding of the 'other' and the action of the

'other' on myself. Just because the 'other' is integral to myself, if I am to act correctly I must take account of the 'other' as far as I am able. This is obvious in the simple fact that in order to achieve our intentions we have to choose the correct physical means. But it has another important application. Insofar as we recognise the 'other' as another personal being rather than an inanimate object, then we have to take account of his actions, not just as events which have occurred in the past but as part of a sequence which includes his present awareness and potentiality for action. This is not to say that we can foresee the other's actions, but only that we must feel ourselves in the other's place. The more that I can do this, the more sensitive my response to each situation will be, and the more my actions will contribute to the working of a vast harmonious whole. God is the supreme agent, not primarily because He is more powerful than a human agent but because He is more sensitive. Because He is more sensitive He can share our joys and sorrows as no human agent can and can answer our needs as no human agent can.

What this implies, if we are to take both our own agency and God's agency seriously, is an expansion in our self-awareness. God as the infinite agent is aware of the whole world : we as finite agents are only aware of a very limited area of experience and it is to an even more limited degree that we adopt the attitude of personal relationship. But God stands in personal relationship to the whole world if we are to understand His agency aright. On the human level we see how personal relationships of various kinds expand our experience and enable us to relate ourselves in increasingly complex ways to our environment, so that we experience it to a certain extent as an integral part of ourselves. Our self-awareness is expanded to include a larger area of

experience. We must suppose that the personal relationship of the worshipper to the infinite agent will have the effect of increasing the awareness of the worshipper to an even greater degree, so that the more his interaction with God is allowed to proceed, the more will his awareness of the world expand to approximate in some faint degree to that of God Himself.

Personal Existence

One reason for regarding selves as subsistences of some kind is that it seems to guarantee their continuing existence and individuality. It is tempting to look for one constant impression of the self which is the source of our self-identity. We have agreed with recent writers, however, that we can form no coherent conception of the self apart from its agency and that this agency is expressed primarily in its bodily aspect of interaction with the 'other'.

One of the main reasons for supposing that there is a 'something' behind our bodily expression which is independent of the body is that this supposition has provided reason to suppose that our personal existence may continue after death. But what can this 'something' be? As we have seen, if the self is primarily a knowing subject then this makes all selves essentially identical, and this is not the kind of personal existence which it is intended to safeguard. On the other hand, if the self is primarily an agent then its agency cannot be understood apart from its bodily expression. Whereas thought or consciousness could be regarded as a permanent 'something' behind the bodily facade, action can only be a never-ending flux. It may be replied that this takes us back to the subject of action : there must be someone who has the intentions and performs the actions. But when we try to analyse this someone we get nowhere. It is simply the bare consciousness which spans this moment and the next.

We have rejected the account of the self as a subsistance, intuition or impression which is the subject of our experience, and have argued that the only account of the self which does justice to the religious consciousness as well as to empirical experience is that which starts from the agency of the self. There remain, however, difficulties which can only be briefly indicated here. The religious consciousness seeks for an account of the self which will guarantee its continuing survival in some recognisable form after death. The analysis of the self as an agent apparently gives us little comfort here. We have largely concurred with recent philosophical analysis which links our personal existence as agents inextricably with our bodily experience. Strawson, for example, in Individuals analyses 'person' as a basic particular to whom both bodily and mental predicates are equally applicable. He suggests that the only form of personal survival which is plausible on this basis would be based on memories of our past life, which must be supposed to fade and eventually perish with the passing of time. This would not meet the demands of theism which calls for a positive continuation and consummation of life.

Personal Identity

The question of personal identity is crucial. The theist needs an account of the self which will show its unique significance. I have argued that an account of the self as an agent can provide this, for the uniqueness of the self is provided by the unique pattern of choices and actions which constitute its life. On this basis, however, it becomes difficult to account for personal existence after death. There are two possible criteria of personal identity : memory or bodily experience. Since bodily experience ceases with death, the only possible criterion of personal identity after death would seem to be memory. Apart from the difficulty that a personal survival based on memory would be purely an

individual survival which could have no knowledge of any other disembodied beings, it is difficult to see how memory by itself could act as the sole criterion of personal identity.[1] Memory may be mistaken. It is essential to the concept of remembering that there should be a distinction between remembering and only seeming to remember. In order to check on the correctness of my memories I cannot refer to other of my memories. I must refer to the testimony of others and this will refer to bodily experience, which can be correlated with what I remember. It is true that in accepting the testimony of others I am accepting their memory claims without a check. Nevertheless what the memory claims of others testify to is my bodily identity, the continuity of my bodily existence in time. In a disembodied existence there would be no way for me to check whether or not I was remembering correctly. I would not be able to distinguish fact from imagination. Consequently there could be no certainty that the self which I remembered myself to be was the same as the self which was doing the remembering and thus no means of establishing my personal identity. My memories would all be mine but in cases of doubt I would have no means of knowing whether they were memories of what really happened or not.

One way of approaching this problem would be through an analysis of the personal identity of God. We have already noted that for the Christian at any rate, it is the assurance of the continuance of his relationship to God which gives most significance to accounts of the after-life. As it is the nature of God which gives the believer a clue as to his own nature, so an analysis of the criteria for the self-identity of God may give an indication of how his own continuing self-identity may be regarded.

1 See, for example, Sydney S. Shoemaker, Personal Identity and Memory and Terence Penelhum, Personal Identity, Memory, Survival, both in Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 56 (1959).

Another possibility is to re-examine the meaning which is attached to the traditional concepts which deal with the end and meaning of life with the object of seeing whether they retain their significance when interpreted in terms of this life rather than the next. It might be that the emotive aura which pertains to one interpretation could equally well pertain to an alternative reading. This procedure has been followed by, for example, Professor R.W. Hepburn.[1] Professor Hepburn discusses the difficulties involved in construing eternity as a kind of atemporal existence, and examines ways in which discourse about eternity may be a means of drawing attention to features of our present experience.

This line of approach has obvious relevance to a contemporary reinterpretation of Shankara and Rāmānuja. The interests of modern thinkers have shifted from other-worldly ideals to the concerns of this world. It is a fairly short step from showing the compatibility of this-worldly concerns with traditional metaphysics to the reinterpretation of traditional metaphysics in such a way that it throws light on this world rather than the next. In Shankara's case there is in fact traditional precedent for this move. The concept of the jīvanmukta, the man who has achieved liberation in this life, has always been important. In focussing attention on what can be achieved in this life Shankara gives experiential content to his metaphysical ideas.

The jīvanmukta is the embodiment of the witness-self, the spectator of existence who is unmoved by what he experiences. We have already seen the incoherence of interpreting this as an existence which is out of time. The jīvanmukta, however, still exists in time so his experiences must be describable in temporal terms. In what way can time be

1 B.B.C. Talks, Trouble with Eternity, 1968.

transcended by one who still exists in time? The practical significance of the urge to transcend time lies in the tyranny which time appears to exercise in our lives. Because life occurs in a temporal sequence our immediate experience is limited. The motivation of our lives continually directs our thoughts to see the consummation of our purposes in the future, yet the future is fraught with uncertainty so that our efforts may appear to be mocked. The emphasis on the future causes us to neglect the present until our lives begin to seem eaten up by time. If only we could achieve a condition which was out of time yet in which we experienced time as panoramically before us.

There are moments in this life when we do have such an experience. Listening to music is one such experience when the music is heard as a total created unity and not just a background : a similar experience may occur when watching a play or reading a novel. In these experiences we are able, dependent largely on our own skill and experience, to contemplate a temporal sequence as a whole. Although the events in the sequence have occurred successively they are present to our consciousness all at once. One of the features of such experiences is that we ourselves are not personally involved : we are spectators. This means that our actions do not affect the situation in any way apart from the fact we have already noted that our comprehension of the situation may depend upon our own powers. Another feature of such situations is that since our actions cannot affect the development of the temporal sequence, we are free to give full attention to each individual moment in its own right. Paradoxically, as spectators who are in a position to appreciate the full significance of the temporal sequence, we are also in a position to view each of the individual events as a timeless 'now'. As R.W. Hepburn puts it in the talks referred to earlier, 'The allusions,

back and forth ..... are contained schematically in one's posture of consciousness at that very moment .....'

The concept of the witness-self may be construed as the injunction that we should regard our own lives as if we were the spectators of a drama on the stage. This has links with Shankara and Rāmānuja's description of the world as līlā, the play of God. As play, the world and our experiences in it are to be regarded as things which exist in their own right, and with which we are not to regard ourselves as personally involved. As our understanding of a play is something which may be increased by our own efforts to appreciate it, so this attitude of the spectator is something which may be cultivated in ourselves with respect to our own lives until a more synoptic standpoint is arrived at. Here we see the relevance of the ideal of the sthita-prajña, the man of steady understanding. He is the man who has achieved this synoptic standpoint and maintains it consistently. Consequently he is not tyranised by time. He does not allow himself to become anxious over the future but he is able to appreciate each moment as it comes as a timeless 'now'.

The foregoing represents one way in which time may be transcended in this life and the level of existential anxiety reduced. The merits of this attitude are many. It may be objected, however, that it does not treat empirical life adequately since the transcending of time is only achieved by denying the reality of action. If it is correct that the self is first and foremost an agent rather than a knowing subject, then however attractive the ideal of the witness-self is, it cannot be regarded as the whole story.

It may be that it is a mistake to attempt a philosophical account of the possibility of personal survival outside the setting of the more specific

theological statements which each faith has made on the subject. In Christianity the emphasis has been on resurrection rather than after-life and in Hinduism we have the belief in transmigration to reckon with. We shall end with a brief comment on each of these.

The doctrine of resurrection is in full accord with the understanding of the agency of the self as manifested in its bodily activity. It has of course, enormous difficulties of other kinds which are not our concern here. The believer may well feel that the promise of 'new heavens and a new earth', with which the promise of resurrection is linked, is sufficient to dispose of difficulties of a practical nature. On the philosophical side, the problem is that of re-establishing the identity of persons after an interval of time in which there has been no bodily activity, and under conditions which, while they may reasonably be supposed to bear some resemblance to present conditions, must also be supposed to be radically different in various vital respects.

We have already noted the axiomatic character of the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Re-birth is necessary because each action produces fresh consequences and so the cycle of life must continue to repeat itself until the chain is broken and the self becomes free from the world of action. One problem concerns the identity of the self from one existence to the next and further, the identity of the self who finally achieves liberation or moksha. The fact that people seldom claim to remember their previous incarnations does not seem to have been felt as a serious problem. The important point has been the belief that what I start from in this life is the result of a set of actions in a previous life, and that how I act in this life will have an important bearing on my station in the next. Here we see the importance of the viewpoint

which regards the self as primarily a knowing subject. As a knowing subject rather than an agent I can dissociate myself from my actions. They are something that happen to me and not anything for which I may be regarded as responsible. They only appear to be mine because I falsely associate myself with my bodily and mental activity. One of the consequences of this view is to make the existence of the self atemporal from the start. As the Christian doctrine of resurrection reflects an essentially temporal view of life in which life can only be significant within time, so the Hindu account of transmigration reflects a view of the self which places its real life beyond time.

What differences do these views make to the understanding of the significance of personal existence? In particular, is it possible to interpret these views in terms of our analysis of the self as an agent, so as to give expression to traditional religious expectations?

What of Rāmānuja's theism? As we have seen, Rāmānuja stresses the importance of the relationship between the worshipper and his God and hence the ultimacy of the individual 'I'. His criticism of Shankara is that his account of the end of life can have no appeal if 'I' am not to be there to experience it. Yet some of Rāmānuja's basic assumptions run counter to the claims he wishes to make. There is no evidence that he found difficulties in the doctrine of transmigration, yet on the assumption that the experiencing 'I' is ultimate, it does not make sense to talk of my being reborn unless I can recognise myself as the same individual who was present in a previous existence. (On Shankara's account such recognition is not necessary since the actions which make up a life are simply a sequence of cause and effect in which the true self really plays no part.)

We have argued that although non-dualism is the official creed of the majority of contemporary Vedānta philosophers, yet theistic considerations play an important part in their thinking, and further that the recognition of the importance of empirical life implies the acceptance of the agency of the self. In spite of the similarity in the metaphysical problems faced by each tradition, the terms of their practical outworkings are radically different in each case. The fact that an adequate metaphysics of the personal is required by each tradition does not imply that their understandings of the unique significance of the individual person are alike.

The important point of divergence stems from a difference in the understanding of the relationship of the world to God. In Hinduism the world is part of the self-expression of God and therefore in some way necessary to His being. In Christianity, in spite of the attempts of Idealist philosophers, the world remains the act of God and external to His being. The consequence of this is that within Hinduism the individual is important and unique as an expression of the Absolute Reality, Brahman. In Christianity he is important because God has created him as a unique individual with a unique destiny. This difference is vital. It means that the Christian expectation regarding the after-life is greater than the Hindu. It is a tragedy to consider the individual to have perished at death since he is God's creation, made to walk in fellowship with his Creator. For the Hindu, the individual, even when his uniqueness is recognised, is still an evanescent expression of Brahman, who is continually expressing Himself in myriad ways in the līlā of the world. Even in an evolutionary philosophy such as that of Aurobindo, ~~which repudiates a cyclical view of time and insists that time plays a real part in the self-development of the Absolute,~~

the individual is still only one stage in Brahman's self-development and will inevitably be superceded by a more complete expression of the Absolute.

These considerations mean that if an account of the agency of the self runs into difficulties over the question of personal survival, the problem for the Hindu philosopher is of slighter magnitude than for the Christian. Even the Hindu theists are not committed to the continued survival of unique individuals, but only to the existence on different occasions, of different manifestations of the divine. 'All that is Brahman' and it is the individual's realisation that he is a part of 'all this' and hence a part of Brahman which gives meaning to his existence.

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